ESSAYS AND LETTERS

ON

IMPORTANT

THEOLOGICAL SUBJECTS;

COMPRISING

AN INQUIRY INTO THE EXTENT OF

THE DIVINE DECREES.—THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST.—

THE DUTY OF MAN;

AND OF THE ABILITY OF MAN TO PERFORM HIS DUTY.

BY JAMES HARGREAVES.

'O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help.'—HOSEA.

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PREFACE.

"Of making many books," says the wise man, "there is no end." This language is not inapplicable at the present time. It may, indeed, be affirmed that in no preceding age were there an equal number of volumes issued from the press. This is not to be regretted, as their variety adapts them to all classes of society; and, by their circulation, knowledge is increased. Of the propriety of this addition to the number already extant there will, no doubt, be a difference of opinion. I will state some of the reasons which have induced me to write upon the subjects discussed in this volume, and then throw myself upon the indulgent candour of my readers.

On a public occasion, in 1822, one of our most popular and eminent ministers, holding a highly responsible situation, avowed, from the pulpit, his belief of the position, that "God, for his own glory, hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass." Conceiving this language to be at variance both with the sacred Scriptures and with the creed of the preacher, who was remarkable for his zealous and persevering efforts against hyper-Calvinism, I took the liberty of writing to him, stating my opinion that the position was unscriptural, and requesting his matured thoughts upon it in the Baptist Magazine. This request was complied with, and

an article appeared in that periodical, *On the Divine Decrees*, in October, 1822, in which the excellent man, and estimable preacher, endeavoured to vindicate the doctrine of their universality. I felt disappointed, and wrote a reply, explanatory of my own views, and sent it for insertion in the same journal, but it was deemed inadmissible. I was informed by the Editor that my opinion on the subject was considered erroneous; and that, by implication, I denied the existence and government of God. Both for that gentleman and for the preacher I had the highest respect, and to their judgment I paid great deference; and now they are both removed into a world of perfect light and happiness, I cherish for their memories the most lively affection, while I hope to meet them where no difference of opinion will interrupt our bliss. I repeatedly applied for the return of my paper, but did not obtain it until February, 1825, when it came to hand with a note expressing pleasure that it had not been printed. From that time I have had the subject more or less upon my mind, and have taken opportunities to introduce it in conversation, to learn the general opinion entertained upon the point by the religious public. I have been grieved to find that a considerable proportion of them maintain, what appears to me erroneous, that "God has fore-ordained whatever comes to pass;" others float down the stream with them, thinking that to dispute the correctness of the opinion would loosen the stakes of an ancient landmark, while but few decidedly condemn the sentiment. In my reading I have endeavoured to ascertain the opinions of justly celebrated authors, and have been pained to discover so many of them giving countenance to this doctrine. At

different times I made extracts from their writings, putting down a few observations of my own. An increased conviction of the importance of the subject, as connected with the whole system of revealed truth, and as involving the character of the Most High, has been the result.

Regret that I have not taken more pains with my manuscript, and re-modelled and condensed my remarks, and brought them to bear more uniformly and directly upon the question, and purged away all extraneous matter, would *now* be useless, notwithstanding the cause for it will be very obvious to the attentive reader, but not more so than to myself. This concession is made, not to disarm the critic, but as an acknowledgment which truth demanded. I am inclined to speak much more highly of the sentiment maintained than of its advocate. It has given me no little uneasiness that some abler pen has not been wielded to represent more clearly, and defend more powerfully, the truth contended for than my measure of talent and leisure would permit.

I hope I shall be enabled to receive thankfully the just, though they may appear severe, remarks that may be made upon the composition of the book, and especially if the main positions of it be approved. I do not ask, "Is it well written?" but, "are the sentiments it avows supported by the word of God?" The casket is but of small moment compared with the jewels it contains. The nature and kind of our food is of more importance than the service, or the manner in which it is placed before us.

Whatever may be the imperfections of the ensuing pages they may awaken attention and induce

individuals to examine the consistency of their creed. I recollect the time when the argument that divine foreknowledge *must* be built on Divine Decrees was to *me* unanswerable. This may be the case with many at the present day. To such I say, "Search the Scriptures:" they will well repay you for all your trouble. "Buy the truth, and sell it not."

Human creeds ought not to usurp the place and authority of Holy Writ, nor to be as the laws of the Medes and Persians, which did not admit of a change. However excellent in their kind, they were composed by fallible men, and ought not to be imposed on the conscience.

"A medical gentleman, some years ago, of more wit than piety, being about to be admitted Professor in the University of Glasgow, had, as is usual, to appear before the presbytery to express his assent, and to affix his subscription, to the Westminster Confession, when the Moderator, holding up the book, thus accosted him—'Doctor, does this book contain the confession of your faith?' 'It contains a' that I believe,' said the Doctor, 'and mickle mair.'" How much better to appeal to the infallible oracles of eternal truth.

The evident change that has taken place among the Dissenters of the Calvinistic persuasion within the last thirty or forty years, respecting the nature and extent of the Atonement of Christ, has led me, within that period, repeatedly to examine my own views upon the subject.

The doctrine of the Atonement I consider as a fundamental doctrine, and essential to the gospel of Christ. Every administration of the Lord's Supper is a virtual acknowledgment of the nature,

necessity, and importance of the atonement. But whether to view the death of Christ as making a *general* atonement for the sin of all mankind, or as being *limited* to the people of God, was to me, for a long time, a source of great perplexity. For many months in the year 1794, my mind was in a state of painful anxiety. I could not perceive if Jesus did not die for all, how divine justice could suffer the unredeemed to live. COLES on *God's Sovereignty*, and other authors, were recommended to my consideration, but they did not remove my scruples. A minister of the Calvinistic persuasion, an excellent man, who was esteemed a sound divine, in attempting to solve my doubts, said, "the non-elect or unredeemed were spared that they might fill up the measure of their sin." "The iniquity of the Amorites," said he, "is not yet full." But when asked if sin could be a ground for the exercise of preserving mercy, he referred it to divine sovereignty. Neither of these solutions were satisfactory. It appeared to me that if any were unredeemed, they could not be permitted to live, and enjoy the blessings of Providence; and that if all were redeemed, none could finally perish. In my distress of mind upon this subject, I hope I was led to mix much prayer with my meditations. One evening I was musing on these words—"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." My thoughts flowed thus:—If the Lord is a shepherd, then his people are sheep. But why are they denominated sheep? For many reasons, as—because they are harmless, humble, meek, patient, useful, &c. But the question arose, wherein are they useful? The case of Sodom occurred. If there had been ten righteous the city had been spared for their sakes. The righteous stand in the gap to turn aside the indigna-

tion of the Lord. "All things are for your sakes." Besides, it arose in my mind, that if God had chosen a certain number of the human race, and the Redeemer had died for them, the love and justice of God combined together to secure their birth, life, conversion, and glorification. Here I arrived at the conclusion, that the non-elect and unredeemed must live to give birth to those who were elected and redeemed. Justice as well as mercy requires this. The purposes of love must be accomplished, and the objects of redemption must be saved. The death of Christ, therefore, secures the lives of all who are immediately or remotely the channel through which the elect are to come into existence, or, in other words, all who are connected with those for whom he died. The people of God are, therefore, useful. They must live, and others must live for their sakes. General preservation is the effect of redemption.

Many of the dissenting ministers in America, especially those of the Baptist denomination, represent the Atonement, both from the pulpit and the press, as "*definite* and *limited*," in opposition to those who have held that the atonement was *general*, and made as much and truly for those that were lost as for those who were saved. The Rev. Howard Malcolm, of Boston, has lately preached and published a sermon upon the subject, which is warmly recommended by the Reviewer.

"The vicariousness of the atonement, taken in any defensible sense, is wholly incompatible with the theory of its being general. It is not possible to form even an imagination of Christ's dying in the room and stead of *sin*.

"The strict vicariousness of the atonement being admitted, it follows either that Christ died in the

stead of *all* men, or in the stead of *some* men. If instead of all men, then all are acquitted by the substitution. If any are held to answer the penalty of their own sins, the atonement is not vicarious.

"Purification by the grace of Christ is commensurate with redemption by the death of Christ."* Such is the opinion of at least some of the American divines.

Limited redemption is supposed by many to be inconsistent with the universal invitations of the gospel. Some modern writers, as Fuller and Williams, Dwight and Hinton, represent these as irreconcileable. Hence they coalesce with the Arminians, in representing the death of Christ as making a general atonement for all. I do not recollect that I ever opposed the universal call of the gospel, or ever saw cause to do so. It appears so plain upon the general face of the scripture, and the denial of it involves so many contradictions and absurdities, that I am constrained to admit its propriety ; and I feel equally satisfied that all for whom the Redeemer died shall walk in the way of holiness, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy. "The redemption of Jesus," says an able divine, "consisteth in a deliverance from the curse of the law, from all iniquity, from the tyranny of Satan, the spirit of bondage, the sting of death, the ruins of mortality, and from the wrath to come."† I am constrained to maintain that sinners generally are invited to come to Christ, and that all for whom Christ died will be saved, even though I could not see the possibility of their reconciliation. I am not at liberty to re-

* *Baptist Repository;* New York, March 1, 1833.

† Hall's Help to Zion's Travellers, 2nd Edition, p. 141.

duce the word of God to a level with my weak comprehension; nor, for fear of inconsistency, to accommodate it to my creed. To harmonize these does not, in my opinion, present an insuperable difficulty. Whether that is effected in the following pages the reader must judge for himself.

In the year 1820, I was requested to reconcile, in a public discourse, the particularity of the Atonement with the increased guilt and punishment of those sinners for whom no atonement is made, and who eventually despise and reject the Saviour. The substance of what is contained in the Third Part of the Essay on the Atonement was delivered on that occasion. That there is no difficulty, real or apparent, in harmonizing these points, will not be affirmed; but I conceive that the same difficulties will lie in the way of all who maintain the doctrine of particular election, and particular or limited salvation. To limit the efficiency of divine grace anywhere between election and final glorification involves, I conceive, the same consequences as does the doctrine of particular redemption.

Divine Providence places us in situations we could not have anticipated, and hence duties devolve upon us which we had not previously contemplated. This was the case with me respecting the employment of my pen on the Duty of Man. In the year 1818, I was placed in circumstances which, in my judgment, not only fully justified me in writing upon that subject, but imperatively required me to do so; leaving me no alternative but either to state and defend my views, or suffer it to be reported that I renounced, or could not support them. A minister of some notoriety, with whom I had been drawn into a correspondence respecting the moral law, wished to decline the discussion of that subject, as

not being "the chief bone of contention." "The principal points in dispute," says he, "between you and me, at this time, are, what gives a poor sinner a right to Christ, and whether or not the faith of God's elect is the duty of the non-elect." "As you have made no reply to mine upon *duty-faith*, I wish to know whether you mean to say any thing or not." "I wish you to let me know whether or not the *faith of God's elect be the duty of the non-elect.*"

I now felt it not so much a matter of choice as of duty to reply, and to state my views upon the subject, which I did in a series of letters to my opponent. These letters were never answered, published, or returned. I had not a perfect copy of them, but, from some rough and imperfect notes, I afterwards wrote what I now venture to place before the eye of the public. It will be clearly seen that I do not deny, but strenuously maintain, the necessity and efficiency of the influence of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, sanctification, and perseverance in holiness. But, at the same time, I contend that that which exists not, and which never will exist, only where the Spirit of God produces it, may, nevertheless, be the imperative duty of the sinner, and for the neglect of which, he is justly threatened with eternal death. "He that believeth not shall be damned." Both these facts I consider as clearly revealed in the word of truth, and that if we deny them we shall be unable to ascribe either the sinner's salvation to free and sovereign grace, or his damnation to himself.

In the latter part of the year 1807, I was requested to preach in the pulpit of an excellent and highly esteemed brother. I selected for my text the words of the Saviour—"If I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?" I made some remarks on *unbelief*—

the *cause*, and the *aggravations* of it. Some time after, I received a letter from the worthy minister of the place, from which I copy the following extract:—

"I have not had an opportunity of conversing with you since you were at ———. I thank you for the sermon on unbelief: I heard it in general with peculiar satisfaction. But one position was advanced which hurt my mind, as I apprehend it to be directly contrary to the word of God. You intimated that faith is not only the duty of man, but that it is in his power to perform it; otherwise, why is it required? I will not enter into controversy, but I think the assertion should have been expressed with more caution. If, by believing, you only mean an assent to the truth of divine revelation, and to the doctrines contained therein, the position is true and just. Nothing supernatural is requisite to discern the force of the evidences which we have afforded to us of divine truth. If these evidences are clear and plain, a mind that is wholly unsanctified may be convinced of the truth of them, and believe them as a thousand other things are believed. This is the case in numberless instances. It is certainly in the power of man, where the gospel comes, thus to believe. To assert the contrary, would be to declare that the evidence is not sufficient.

"But, if you speak of that faith which purifies the heart, attaches the soul to Christ, overcomes the world, and all the evils that are in it, and powerfully works by love to God and man, you cannot affirm this to be in the power of a natural man, without sinking into the very depths of Arminianism, and flatly contradicting the testimony of God. 'No man can come, unless the Father draw.—Faith is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.—It is given

you to believe,' &c., &c. To argue from the command of God, that fallen man has, in his present state, power to obey it, is a fallacious way of reasoning. Has degenerate man power to love God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength? If he has, let us never urge upon him the necessity of regeneration. Thus, we cannot safely argue from what is man's duty, that, in his present lapsed state, he has full power to obey. I hope you will excuse these hints, suggested in a friendly way, and on the ground of faithful love."

Such was my respect and deference for the personal character and judgment of this venerable and eminent minister of God, that, if human authority could have satisfied my mind, I should at once have embraced his opinion, and rejected my own. But I durst not, however strong the temptation, call any man master, or bow to any authority less than divine. It pained me that I had "hurt his mind;" and the more so, that it was hurt by what I deemed to be the truth of God. I wrote him an affectionate and sincerely grateful reply, and pledged myself to re-examine the subject with prayer and impartiality. The result was, a firmer conviction than ever of the truth of my principle. This circumstance gave no interruption to our friendship, which continued unbroken, increased and increasing, to his death.

The more I consider the question, "Is man's present power equal to his present duty?" the more I am constrained to acknowledge that it is so; unless I could believe that God eternally damns men upon mere prerogative; or, which amounts to the same thing, for not performing impossibilities.

Too many persons confound or identify the causes of salvation and damnation. If you mention the sinner's power to obey God, and to avoid sin, the

opponent will turn round upon you, and say, "Then he can save himself without divine influence, and faith is not the gift of God." The inference is unjust. The sentiment implies no such thing. Man is not condemned for not saving himself, but for not submitting to be saved by another. He stumbles at the stumbling-stone which God has laid in Zion. Nothing short of omnipotent influence will subdue his enmity. But that enmity ought not to exist. My design in these Letters is to remove the odium cast upon Deity by those who represent him as reaping where he has not sown; to vindicate his justice in the final condemnation of his enemies, and his grace in the salvation of all that believe.

It may not be improper to state, that the several parts which compose this work were written at different and rather distant periods, and not with any supposition that they would ever appear together in one volume. This will account for the same sentiment, and, in some cases, the same language being repeated under different heads. Though the subjects are clearly distinct, there is an intimate affinity between them, which, under the circumstances in which I wrote, naturally and imperceptibly led me to repetition.

The questions discussed in this volume are, beyond all controversy, of the greatest importance. They are connected closely with the Christian's views of divine truth, his religious experience, and his practice. It is exceedingly desirable that correct opinions respecting them should be generally entertained, especially by students in theology, who are set apart to instruct sinners in the way of salvation. From erroneous views of some or all of these topics originate most of the religious delusions of the present day. It has been my wish to expose dan-

gerous errors, and to disseminate those doctrines with which the best interests of man are connected. I hope my attempt, however feeble, will secure the approbation of all who are attached to the truth as it is in Jesus.

The sentiments for which I contend are, in my opinion, honourable to Deity, and not only equitable, but benevolent, to responsible agents. Justice and grace, on these principles, shine forth with peculiar splendour in the damnation and salvation of rebellious man. Blame and praise are awarded to their proper objects. Man is the author of his own ruin, and God is the sole and exclusive author of man's recovery and salvation. The sinner is not doomed by an immutable eternal decree to final misery, nor punished with everlasting destruction for the unavoidable commission of appointed crime, or the non-performance of impossibilities. The principles pervading the work are these two—"*All real good is from God—All real evil is from the creature.*" If there is any sentiment in the volume which contradicts either, or both these, or which cannot be reconciled with them, let it be discarded. Whatever moral evil there may be in this world, and whatever man may suffer in time or in eternity, no blame can attach to the Divine Being. Man destroys himself. Whatever real good—natural, moral, or eternal—is enjoyed on earth, or in heaven, no praise is due to man. "Salvation is of the Lord." Praise belongs to him, and blame to the creature. These principles are founded upon immutable truth, and the fitness of things; and, to unbiassed reason, recommend themselves, as amounting to demonstrations and self-evident axioms. They contain, with respect to the deserts of man, the sum of divine revelation.

So far as I am acquainted with myself, and with my views of truth, I firmly believe and zealously propagate and defend the doctrines of divine and distinguishing grace. This will be perceived in my Essay on Redemption. I conceive that these doctrines cannot be consistently maintained and harmonized with any system which represents Jehovah as the decretal author of sin, or as punishing man by a mere act of divine sovereignty.

It has been my fervent prayer to the Father of lights, that I might write under the influence of a Christian temper, and with a constant reference to the oracles of eternal truth. A cavilling, censorious spirit, and opposition for the sake of promoting a party, I professedly disapprove and renounce. The real differences among good men are frequently more in words than things; and I have no wish to make them appear wider than they really are. I should be glad if I could conciliate all my opponents. Should any thing be found in the following pages inconsistent with this avowal, let it be attributed to oversight, or ignorance, or to any thing rather than a design to offend or to misrepresent.

It is affectionately hoped that the Christian, in perusing this work, will carefully examine its bearings upon the whole system of revealed truth; and especially upon his own creed, experience, and practice. If I mistake not, the principles here maintained enter very deeply into the nature of religion in all its parts. Let us realize the important transactions of the last day. "God will judge the world in righteousness." None of his creatures will be consigned to everlasting misery for the commission of fore-ordained sin, or for the omission of that which they never had a power to perform. That which would entail eternal infamy upon a mortal

man shall not be ascribed to the Judge of all the earth. "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid!" "For how then shall God judge the world?"

Let the reader lay aside all his prejudices against names and parties, and examine what is here offered to his consideration with an unbiassed mind. Let him appeal, in making his decisions, not to Calvinism or Arminianism, but solely to the Holy Scriptures. Let us remember, that railing is not reasoning, and that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

After serious and impartial examination, it perhaps will be concluded by some, that the ground I have taken is untenable; that the *decrees* of God, and the *atonement* of Christ, are *universal*; and that it is not the duty of a sinner *to believe* in the Saviour with all his heart; or, that he has not *power* or ability to comply with what God justly requires from him. Truth is my object. If I err on these points, my error is not a trivial one, and the sooner I am convinced of it the better. I shall esteem that man my friend who affectionately takes me by the hand and shews me a safer and a more excellent way. This, however, will not be effected by scorn and ridicule; by railing, sarcasm, and irony; by representing the opinions as heterodox, as rank Arminianism, or legality. I hope that I shall be willing to relinquish any portion of my creed when clear and decisive evidence from the Scriptures is produced that I am wrong. Though I revere the memory and the judgment of Calvin and Luther, of Twiss and Crisp, of Gill and Toplady, and others, yet I shall not be convinced of error simply on their authority. I bow only to the law and testimony of

God. Gratuitous assertions, without proof, and supposed inferences, not legitimately founded upon the premises, should be disregarded. Whatever may be offered in a Christian spirit against the principles here avowed, with more desire to elicit truth and to produce conviction than to gain conquest and victory, will be most thankfully received, and most seriously examined; and its correcting, enlightening, reproving, or confirming effects, most sincerely acknowledged.

Whether the public, generally, will justify or condemn me for bringing these subjects before them is not for me to determine. Should I meet with more censure than praise, and with some pecuniary loss, I shall not be much disappointed. I shall enjoy, at all events, the satisfaction, that before I "put off this my tabernacle," I have borne my feeble testimony to what I deem the truth of God, and that, "after my decease," some few will "have these things always in remembrance." Every one must give an account to God how he has employed his talents and improved his opportunities.

I would take, and give to all my readers, the advice recorded by Dr. Watts, in his book on the *Improvement of the Mind*:—

"Seize upon truth where'er 'tis found,
Amongst your friends, amongst your foes,
On Christian or on heathen ground,—
The flower's divine where'er it grows:
Neglect the prickles, and secure the rose."

Waltham Abbey,—October, 1833.

ESSAY I.

ON THE DIVINE DECREES.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

The Being of God.—The Sufficiency of the Scriptures.—Objections to the existence of Divine Decrees, and to Controversial Discussions, noticed.—Definition of Terms.

In entering on the discussion pursued in these pages, it is assumed that there is a God, who made and sustains all things;—that man is the creature of God, dependent upon him; and, as a rational and intelligent being, is accountable to him for all his volitions and actions;—that, by the transgression of his Maker's law, man has offended him, and thus become liable to the just effects of his holy displeasure; and that, notwithstanding this, man must exist for ever. It is farther assumed, that God, in the infinitude of his love and mercy, has devised an honourable medium through which human sinners may be delivered from the wrath to come, and made partakers of boundless felicity in the eternal enjoyment of himself;—that the Bible is the word of God, containing a clear and full revelation of his will; and that it is man's only, certain, and infallible guide in all matters of faith and practice. In all things,

therefore, an appeal is made to the holy Scriptures in support of the doctrines maintained in this treatise.

God has furnished man, in his works and in his word, with materials for contemplation, and with motives to regulate his conduct. He has given a revelation of himself, through the medium of his only begotten Son, adapted to excite the ceaseless admiration of angels and of men. The glorious perfections of his infinite nature,—the sovereign and immutable purposes of his heart,—the ancient and ever-during covenant of his grace,—the good and righteous precepts of his holy law,—the exceeding great and precious promises of his everlasting gospel,—the attracting invitations, and the most solemn and awful warnings to sinners, are clearly developed in his holy word. Whatever is necessary to be known or done, in order to the present and eternal purity and peace of mankind, is abundantly and explicitly revealed in the Bible. The vision is made plain, "that he may run that readeth it." Every man, therefore, who is favoured with this holy book, ought to make it the object of his incessant study, and to pay a constant and practical regard to the doctrines it recommends. "The holy Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Let us, then, take heed to "the sure word of prophecy, as to a light that shineth in a dark place." "Search the Scriptures," said Jesus, "for they testify of me." All the lines of divine revelation meet in Christ. He is the sum of all the types and shadows of the Old Testament. All the predictions, promises, and purposes of the Father, centre in the Son. Some of the doctrines of divine revelation, especially such as relate "to the mystery of God, and of the Father,

and of Christ," may not be easy of comprehension. They may, from their very sublimity and brightness, appear to us as if wrapt in a veil of obscurity; and perhaps the doctrine of divine decrees may be considered of this description.

Some persons seem disposed to deny the existence of any eternal decrees in the Divine Mind. They think the notion of such unbending appointments casts a reflection upon Jehovah's character. In their opinion, the doctrine of predestination is opposed to freedom in God, and to the liberty of his creatures, and is subversive, if not destructive, of human exertion and hope. Divine decrees, they conceive, may be identified with the doctrine of fate, which makes blind destiny, or invincible necessity, the arbitrary and irresistible disposer of all things. It cannot be expected that persons, under the influence of such prepossessions, should be willing to give the subject a fair and an impartial examination. It is, however, very possible that a considerable portion of their dislike to the doctrine under discussion, has been produced by unfair and unjust representations. Can it be any matter of surprise, that tender minds should seriously hesitate when they hear it affirmed that God hath immutably decreed *whatsoever* comes to pass, not excluding the sins of angels and of men?

In avoiding one extreme, there is danger of falling into another. Many sincere followers of the Redeemer have, from a fear of Antinomianism, approached the borders of Arminianism. Truth shews a narrow path, and impartial examination is the way to find it.

Many discouragements are thrown in the way of those who attempt to investigate the doctrine of the

decrees of God. These decrees are said to be beyond our reach—above our comprehension—and that, in discussing them, we are out of our depth; because they are impenetrable to human minds. We are exhorted to let them alone, and to apply ourselves to practical religion. "It will be soon enough," say some, "to intermeddle with these abstruse points when we enter upon a state of perfect light, where unbounded and eternal sunshine will remove every degree of darkness and obscurity. The mind will then be expanded, and all the clouds that now cover the understanding, and surround the subject, will be dissipated." Archbishop Leighton dissuaded his pupils from attempting to investigate some points of theology, under the persuasion that they can "never be perfectly fathomed by any plummet of human understanding. Wherefore, if you will take my advice," says he, "withdraw your minds from a curious search into this mystery (the origin of evil), and turn them directly to the study of piety, and a due reverence to the awful majesty of God." It was a saying, too, of Dr. Young, that "the dispute about religion, and the practice of it, seldom go together."

Saurin speaks nearly to the same purpose: "The decree is impenetrable. The book of life is sealed. A little less speculation, and more practice. Let us become less curious, and try to be more holy. Let us leave God to *arrange his own decrees*, and, for our parts, let us arrange our actions and our lives."*

This may look plausible and very fine; but is it

* See Dr. Williams's Essay, pp. 9, 10, & 16, 17.

sound and solid? Do men act upon such principles in reference to other subjects? Do philosophers and physicians content themselves without endeavouring to develop the principles of science beyond what was known, or even thought attainable by their predecessors? Are they satisfied that the measure of human knowledge should remain stationary? Whence have sprung all our modern improvements in science and manufactures? Certainly the principles and properties of the elements of nature, and the purposes to which they may be applied, are better understood now than they were a century ago. Little, comparatively speaking, was then known of electricity, of galvanism, of gas, and of the power and properties of steam. Our fathers would have given little credit to the prediction, had they been told that the time would come when machines should be invented whereby one person alone should be capable of producing that which then required the labour of twenty, or even a hundred persons;—that our vessels should be propelled by steam, with amazing velocity, on the surface of the river or the ocean, against both wind and tide;—that a line of carriages, with a hundred passengers, and other heavy weights, should be drawn or propelled on a railway by the power of steam, at the rate of twenty or thirty miles an hour; and that, with a fluid gas, conveyed in tubes many miles under the surface of the ground, our churches, chapels, public rooms, and streets, should be lighted. These things they would have deemed utopian schemes, improbable, and impracticable.

If, then, such discoveries have been made in natural philosophy, why may not the science of theology be explored? Let it not be supposed that

every thing revealed in the holy Scriptures, respecting the ruin of man by sin, and his recovery by divine grace, has been so fully understood as to leave no room for further developement. It may be said that our fathers had every opportunity and capacity for understanding the Bible, equal, and even beyond what many now possess. Many of them were men of profound learning, extraordinary piety, fervent prayer, and ardent devotion, and they spent their lives in the unwearied study of the Scriptures. Surely we cannot pretend to be wiser and better than they! The same supposed argument, however, would forcibly apply to the study of natural philosophy. We have only the same globe, the same firmament, the same materials, which our forefathers had. God has not created for us another world, with different properties, from whence modern improvements have been derived. The volume of nature was accessible to the ancients, as well as the volume of revelation. Why may not the latter be explored, as well as the former? I have no inclination to depreciate the piety, learning, and labours of the divines of former ages; but, on the contrary, I greatly admire their diligence and varied attainments, and freely acknowledge the benefits I have derived from their labours. All this, however, may be done, without conceding the point under consideration. They accomplished much, but it cannot be supposed that they exhausted all the stores of divine truth; no more than it could be affirmed of Bacon and Boyle, Newton and Locke, that, in employing their powerful talents in making useful discoveries for the good of mankind, they had fully ransacked all the properties and stores of nature.

"While we avail ourselves of the labours of our forefathers, we ought not to rest in them without making farther progress, even though it expose us to many unpleasant disputes. *Envy* and strife may be expected to follow those whose researches are really beneficial, provided they go a step beyond their forefathers. But let them not be discouraged; the wells of salvation are worth striving for; and after a few conflicts they may enjoy the fruits of their labours in peace."*

"Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrines of Christ, let us go on to perfection." It is not only permitted, but commanded, that "we follow on to know the Lord." Before we relinquish our pursuit, let it be proved that it is unsafe, unwise, or impossible to proceed further. Humble, patient inquiry, connected with persevering obedience, and practical conformity to what is already known, is generally encouraged, and crowned with farther discoveries. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."†

The opinion of Dr. Watts upon this point is worthy of our regard:—

"Let the hope of new discoveries," says he, "as well as the satisfaction and pleasure of known truths, animate your daily industry. Do not think that the knowledge of any particular subject in any science cannot be improved, merely because it has lain five hundred or a thousand years without improvement.

"Nor should a Student of Divinity imagine that our age is arrived at a full understanding of every

* Fuller, on Gen. chap. xxvi. 18—22. † John vii. 17.

thing which can be known by the Scriptures. Every age since the Reformation hath thrown some further light on difficult texts and paragraphs of the Bible, which had been long obscured by the early rise of Antichrist; and since there are at present many difficulties and darknesses hanging about certain truths of the Christian religion, and since several of these relate to important doctrines, such as the *origin of sin, the fall of Adam, the person of Christ, the Blessed Trinity, and the decrees of God, &c.*, which do still embarrass the minds of honest and inquiring readers, and which make work for noisy controversy, it is certain there are several things in the Bible yet unknown, and not sufficiently explained; and it is certain that there is some way to solve these difficulties, and to reconcile these seeming contradictions. And why may not a sincere searcher of truth in the present age, by labour, diligence, and study, and prayer, with the best use of his reasoning powers, find out the proper solution of those knots and perplexities which have hitherto been unsolved, and which have afforded matter for angry quarreling? Happy is every one who shall be favoured of Heaven to give a helping hand towards that introduction of the blessed age of light and love."*

To the opinion of Dr. Watts, that of Bishop Butler may be added:—"And as it is owned the whole scheme of scripture is not yet understood, so if it ever comes to be understood before the restitution of all things, and without miraculous interposition, it must be in the same way as natural knowledge is come at,—by the continuance and progress

* Dr. Watts's Improvement of the Mind, chap. i. sect. 7.

of liberty, and by particular persons attending to, comparing, and pursuing intimations, scattered up and down in it, which are overlooked and disregarded by the generality of the world. For this is the way in which all improvements are made, by thoughtful men tracing an obscure hint, as it were, dropped us by nature accidentally, or which seem to come into our minds by chance. Nor is it at all incredible that a book which has been so long in the possession of mankind should contain many truths as yet undiscovered. For all the same phenomena, and the same faculties for investigation from which great discoveries in natural knowledge have been made in the present and last age, were equally in the possession of mankind several thousand years before."*

Let not, then, the difficulties suggested deter or discourage our humble inquiry; but let us proceed with due caution, and devout prayer, looking up to "the Father of lights" for divine illumination. He has promised that "the meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way;" and "they also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine."

Another discouragement arises from the consideration that controversial writings, especially upon deep and abstruse points in theology, are at the present day generally deprecated. The religious world mostly applauds indiscriminate candour and charity. All distinctions that do not overthrow the divinity and atonement of Christ are merged, and

* Butler's Analogy, p. 212, Ed. 1802. The reader may also consult President Edwards, on the Freedom of the Will, part iv., sect. xiii.

differing creeds and systems are all deemed unobjectionable. To controvert or disapprove the opinions of others is generally thought uncharitable, and identified with bigotry. Contending for "the faith once delivered to the saints," if not represented as an open violation of the law of love, is considered as a work of supererogation, and entirely uncalled for. Thus we proceed from one extreme to another. Our fathers kept the different sections of the church of Christ in a state of perpetual warfare. They scarcely ever laid aside their armour. The builders of the house of the Lord "had every one his sword girded by his side." And it may still be allowed that controversy, properly conducted, is not to be deprecated. A wish to convince, or to be convinced, needs not to be associated with an angry temper. Truth, however, requires the concession, that a spirit of obstinacy and dogmatism, of asperity and contempt, though not necessarily the offspring of theological debates, has too often been mingled with them. But, how are gainsayers to be convinced, and errors to be confuted, if controversy is prohibited? Christians may evince and exercise brotherly love towards each other in their religious disputes. An attempt to shew a brother his error may be attended with important advantages. "There is danger," says an American writer, "in controversy, we are well aware, but so is there danger in abstaining from controversy. Truth has never made progress without it. Some persons have imagined that the mischief is greater than the benefit, and that piety loses more than truth gains." Should this in some instances prove true, it does not "afford an argument against the use of controversy, nor any proof of its inutility. The fault is not in the dis-

pute, but in the manner of the dispute; not in the nature or tendency of controversy, but in the temper of the persons concerned."

The late celebrated and lamented Robert Hall says, "It may be truly affirmed that the evils of controversy are transient: the good it produces is permanent."*

"It is fashionable," says the late Robert Robinson, "with many divines to boast of their aversion to controversy, and to make a merit of teaching only such doctrines as are not disputable. What a poor piece of business is this! Is there any one doctrine of natural or revealed religion which is not controverted? Does not every deist deny our Bible, and every atheist the being of our God? A man, therefore, that determines to teach only undisputed articles, determines *ipso facto* to teach nothing at all.

"The inspired writings do not countenance any such notion. The whole Jewish religion is styled Jehovah's controversy. The ministry of our Saviour was a perpetual controversy. Paul's Epistles are most of them controversial. The Apostles came at truth by much disputing among themselves; and they convinced Jews and Gentiles by disputing with both."†

"There have been, in some of our churches, meetings of Christians for the purpose of debating a point of theology, or a portion of scripture, or a case of conscience; and these, properly managed with coolness and candour, with gentle and kind dispositions, have often been productive of mutual

* Preface to Hall's Help to Zion's Travellers.

† Robinson's Notes to Claude's Essay, v. 241, 245.

edification. See Dr. Owen's practical cases of conscience resolved at Church Meetings."*

Various reasons have been assigned for a dislike to controversy. Some persons cannot bear contradiction; others are afraid of exposing their own ignorance; while not a few dislike freedom of inquiry. But does not fear of sober and temperate discussion indicate either weakness of mind, an apprehension of error, or indifference to truth? The grounds of offence between opponents are mutual. Another differs no farther from me than I do from him. Our claims to the rights of private judgment are equal. That every man may be "fully persuaded in his own mind," let him "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good."

In verbal or written controversy, it is desirable that party or distinctive appellations be not used invidiously, nor as terms of reproach. The mind should be more intent upon things than words. The terms Calvinist and Arminian, with their derivatives, will be employed in this work, merely for the sake of distinction. It is lamentable that any pious Arminian should suppose that nothing good can belong to Calvinism, and that any devotional Calvinist should feel an aversion to a phrase, or a doctrine, because it is connected with the Arminian's creed. Upon mature deliberation, both parties might be convinced that they maintain, in common, some of the most important doctrines of divine revelation.

The divine purposes have occasioned much controversy. Men of equal erudition and piety have adopted different opinions respecting their nature

* Robinson's Notes to Claude's Essay, v. 245, 246.

and date. Those who advocate the existence, the eternity, and the unchangeableness of these decrees, differ materially in their views respecting their extent. Many eminent theological writers have represented them as universal, comprising every event that transpires within the dominions of Jehovah. Others conceive this opinion to be at variance with the holy Scriptures, and with all our best and most correct notions of the Supreme Being. It is my design, in the following pages, freely and impartially to examine this point, and refer the decision to the law and to the testimony of God.

The language of an eminent writer is deserving of serious consideration:—

"O, when shall it be that a calm and candid investigation of principles will assume the place of precipitate rashness, sweeping conclusions, uncharitable recriminations, and a bigoted overrating of party phrases, to the neglect of accurate conception on subjects that so evidently require it?"*

O Lord, thou fountain of light, in whom there is no darkness at all, be pleased, of thine infinite mercy, so to illumine my understanding, and impress thy truth upon my heart, and so to guide or control my pen, that this work may be prosecuted in thy fear, and be rendered instrumental in promoting thy glory, and the holiness and felicity of mankind. Graciously assist the writer, and mercifully and abundantly bless the reader, for the sake of thy dear Son, to whom, with thee, O Father, and the Holy Spirit, be universal, undivided, and undiminished praises, for ever and ever! Amen.

Before closing this chapter, it may be desirable

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* Notice to Dr. Williams's Essay.

to introduce some explanation of terms, that may be of use in reference to the subject treated of in the subsequent pages.

The words *decree* and *ordain, knowledge* and *foreknowledge,* are used in this work according to their common acceptations; or, if otherwise, the difference is noticed. To *decree sin,* is, I conceive, to appoint it; to determine that it *shall be.* This is the point contended against.

By *the moral government of God,* I mean his righteous dominion over all his rational creatures; his wise and equitable interference by way of influence, permission, or control, so as to do good to all, and injury to none.

Man I consider as a moral agent, and accountable to God for all his volitions and actions. Hence I view him as possessing the power or capability to act for himself. This liberty or freedom is an exemption from constraint or restraint. A man is free when he is not, by any thing out of himself, efficiently caused, forced, compelled, or constrained, to choose or act contrary to his duty; and when he is not hindered, prevented, or restrained, by foreign influence, from choosing and acting aright. It consists in a liberty to act according to his pleasure, or to follow his own inclination. Freedom cannot, with propriety, be predicated of the will, as if freedom itself were a faculty either of the will or of the soul. It belongs to the man to choose or refuse, to act or not to act, to walk, stand, sit, or lie down, to move or be still, at his pleasure. He is not like a watch or machine, that moves as it is moved, but is created with the power of self-government, or a kind of independence. All his power or ability is derived from God, and is under his control, and can be

withheld at any moment. The possession of this liberty, or freedom, or power of self-government, is essential, I conceive, to man's accountability. Divine equity would not require of accountable creatures, upon pain of God's displeasure, that they attend to some things and refrain from others, if they had no liberty to choose or refuse. Without this, a man's actions are not his own, nor can he be justly commended or blamed, rewarded or punished, for them, or considered as a moral agent.*

Necessity relates to the eternal existence of Jehovah. He exists without a cause. All other beings exist not necessarily, but from the will of Him who, being uncaused himself, is the first cause of all created being. Hence it follows of necessity, that God is independent, and all creatures neces-

* I concur with the following quotation:—" *Freedom* and *liberty*, in common speech, is the power, opportunity, or advantage that any one has to do as he pleases. Its contrary is a person's being hindered, or unable to conduct himself as he will, or being necessitated to do otherwise. Neither *liberty*, nor its contrary, can properly be ascribed to any being or thing but that which has such a faculty, power, or property, as is called *will*. For that which is possessed of no will, cannot have any *power* or *opportunity* of doing *according to its will*, nor be necessitated to act contrary to its will, nor be restrained from acting agreeably to it. And, therefore, to talk of liberty, or the contrary, as belonging to the *very will itself*, is not to speak good sense, if we judge of sense and nonsense by the original and proper signification of words. For the *will itself* is not an agent that *has a will*. That which has the power of volition is the man, or the soul, and not the power of volition itself. And he that has the liberty of doing according to his will is the agent who is possessed of the will, and not the will which he is possessed of. Qualities are the properties of persons, and not the properties of properties." (President Edwards's Works, vol. i. pp. 152, 153. Leeds Edit.)

sarily dependent and limited. It was not possible for God to create infinite, independent, all-sufficient, and immutable beings; there must, therefore, by a *necessity* of nature, be a liability to change to defection in every created nature. Man is the subject of necessity as it relates to the objects around him, affecting his senses of feeling, hearing, smelling, &c.; and with regard to his mind, he is so constituted as to be unable both to choose and refuse the same object at the same time; he cannot be silent, and speak; walk, and be at rest; cannot love and hate, receive and reject, desire and not desire, the same object under the same circumstances. Man must of necessity make his elections out of the objects presented, or he could not otherwise be a rational and intelligent being, nor have any account to give for his conduct. The necessity to act leaves him at liberty, in a moral point of view, to act as he likes. Man is of necessity carried through time, but the manner how, whether piously or profanely, he is left to choose. The Lord's day comes and goes. It must be spent; but whether in the counting-house, slumbering on the bed, lounging in the streets or fields, carousing at the tavern, or in acts of private and public devotion, in the closet and at a place of public worship, is left to man to decide. If I deny necessity in this work, it will be as it stands opposed to human liberty, maintaining that man is not under a necessity to violate the rule of his duty, and to expose himself to everlasting ruin. President Edwards and Dr. Williams may be consulted upon this point with advantage.

CHAPTER II.

THE EXISTENCE AND PROPERTIES OF THE DIVINE DECREES.

SECTION I.

On the Existence of the Divine Decrees.

THE Decrees of Jehovah are the holy resolutions or decisions of his eternal mind, respecting his own works. Wise men, in matters of importance, deem it desirable to proceed according to a pre-conceived plan. In the building of a house, the formation of a new road, the erection of a bridge, or the construction of a piece of machinery, persons generally act by a rule. It is not, therefore, absurd to suppose that "the only wise God," antecedently to the exercise of his power, determined within himself what, when, and how he would work. The Author of creation, and of human redemption, either acted without forethought and design, or else he determined to act in the manner he has done. The denial of his decrees would therefore involve most serious consequences. For " to suppose God performs any work which he did not before design to perform, is to charge him with a degree of folly, and with acting below an intelligent agent; and to suppose him to design any thing which he does not effect, is to tax him with impotence. God must design what he effects, and effect what he designs." What book, chapter, or page is there in the volume of eternal truth, in which the doctrine of divine

decrees is not expressed or implied? The perfections of Deity, as displayed in his works, and in his word, lead the contemplative mind to the conclusion, that all his plans must have been concerted in eternity. If we consider, either individually or collectively, the eternity, immutability, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, and self-sufficiency of Jehovah, we must be convinced, beyond all reasonable doubt, that a Being of infinite understanding and goodness would not, and could not, act without a fixed and wisely arranged design. Nor could he form a perfect scheme of his intended works without providing for its certain and infallible accomplishment. To suppose that God created the universe, and that he governs it, by mere chance and uncertainty, without fore-appointments or decrees, is to deprive him of the glory of his unbounded perfections, as displayed in the works of creation and providence. If no arrangement of operation had been settled in the divine mind, how can we say, "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work"? Want of design in Jehovah would prevent us from adopting the exclamation of the Psalmist, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches." If the Almighty did not, antecedently to the exercise of creating influence, devise a plan, and form absolute decrees, then omnipotence was exercised without rule and specific design. Such an idea as this is every way derogatory to the divine glory.

We are, however, certain that the globe we inhabit, with all the solar system, is governed by fixed rules and invariable laws (the case of miracles excepted). Hence, the revolutions of the heavenly

bodies, the flowing and the ebbing of the tides, are so unalterably regular, that men can calculate to absolute certainty their motions, and the time of their returns, for ages past, and for ages to come. The Lord hath appointed the Moon for certain seasons, and caused the Sun to know the time of his going down. The raging ocean he has shut up with doors, and broken up for it his decreed place, and said, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed!" * This appointment has never been revoked by the Lord, nor broken by the roaring billows, except when God has miraculously interfered. It is a perpetual decree, which the restless waves are unable to disannul, or to pass over.†. If, then, God governs the material world by a fixed rule, by an unchanging decree, is it not safe to affirm the same respecting the moral world? The existence of eternal decrees in the divine mind, concerning the being and government of men and angels, cannot be successfully controverted.

The predictions of the Bible, with respect to the dispensations of mercy, or of judgment, exercised towards a guilty world, fully prove the existence of divine decrees.

What is a prophecy of future good, but a decree or purpose revealed? Many prophecies have been already remarkably and circumstantially fulfilled, some are now fulfilling, and others are certain to be accomplished. "I have spoken it, and I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it: I will also do it." The mystery of God, or the scheme of his purposes, most assuredly will be finished or con-

Job xxxviii. 8, 11. † Jer. v. 22.

summated. The same might be affirmed with respect to all the exceeding great and precious promises, given in his word for the consolation of his chosen followers. They are the publication of his gracious decrees. God never gives a promise to his people, or bestows a blessing upon them, without having first formed a purpose to that effect. No future favours or judgments could be promised, predicted, or threatened, with infallibility, if no plan of them existed in the divine mind. It is the purpose of Jehovah that gives them absolute stability and certainty. "Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world," because they are all included in his divine and unchanging decrees.*

The existence of divine decrees might be farther proved from the agency of God, in producing all the good there is in the world; from the inseparable connection there is between cause and effect; from reason and the nature of things; and from many other sources of evidence; but this is not my present design. With the evidence arising from

* It is not denied but that events have been predicted, which God had not decreed, and which he would not undertake to accomplish. These relate to the sin of man. God foretold that Pharaoh would not let the people go; that Hazael would be guilty of cruelty, and that the men of Keilah would deliver up David. The sin of Peter, in denying his Lord, and of Judas in betraying him, were plainly foretold. And it is predicted that there shall be wars and rumours of wars, and that there shall be scoffers in the last days, who shall walk after their own ungodly lusts. These and all similar predictions respecting the cause and existence of moral evil proceed, not on the basis of predestination, but of divine prescience. God effects what he decrees, which cannot be affirmed respecting all he foresees and foretels.

the nature of the divine perfections, from the works, predictions, promises, and threatenings of Jehovah, I feel satisfied, and assume the doctrine of God's ancient decrees as a revealed truth, which cannot be denied without degrading the Author of the universe!* But while I contend for the existence of the decrees of God, as lying at the foundation of all that is wise, and good, and glorious, among angels and men, I can by no means subscribe to the latitude in which some writers have explained them.

SECTION II.

The different Terms by which the Decrees of God are described in the Holy Scriptures.

Assuming the existence of the decrees of God, the attention of the reader is now called to the various representations given of them in the holy Scriptures. The free, wise, and sovereign determinations of God's own most holy will, are the rule according to which all his actions are regulated in the creation and in the government of all things. The works of his hand, in all their endless variety, the operations of his power, wisdom, and goodness, in the incessant dispensation of divine providence, and all that he has promised in the volume of inspiration, are exact copies of his eternal purposes. "Whatsoever God doeth shall be for ever; nothing can be

* On the doctrines of divine decrees many pens have been employed, among which may be named Calvin and Coles, Brine and Gill, Toplady and Tucker, to whose works the reader is referred.

put to it, nor any thing taken from it;" for "he is in one mind, and none can turn him; and what his soul desireth," or determineth, "even that he doeth, for he performeth the thing that is appointed for me; and God doeth it that men should fear before him."* There is no good of any kind, or degree, in our world, but what is the result of his eternal appointment, and the production of his efficient agency. All his works are performed according to the counsel of his own will.

The sacred Scriptures have employed several words of nearly the same import, or only having some shades of difference, in order to exhibit in the clearest light the important doctrine of Divine Decrees. These determinations or resolutions are represented as the THOUGHTS of Deity. "O Lord, how great are thy works! and thy *thoughts* are very deep."† These deep thoughts comprehend that scheme or plan of all his works which he formed in his own mind before the foundation of the world. The eternal thoughts of God in behalf of his people are precious and innumerable.‡ "How precious are thy *thoughts* unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sands."§ Blessings conferred on the world, or on the church, are the counterparts of his previous thoughts, and corresponding with them as the impression upon the wax does with the seal. "I will visit you, and perform my good word unto you; for I know the thoughts that I think towards you—thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end."‖ "For

* Eccles. iii. 14; Job xxiii. 13, 14. † Psalm xcii. 5.
‡ Ibid. xl. 5. § Ib. cxxxix. 17, 18. ‖ Jer. xxix. 10, 11.

my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."* This text has a particular and direct reference to the purpose of God to forgive the wicked who return unto the Lord by faith and repentance.

Respecting the chastisement of the disobedient, God speaketh on this wise: "The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have *thought*, so shall it come to pass, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand."† The same idea is thus explained: "This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?"‡ Thus the thoughts and the purposes of God are identified, as elsewhere his thoughts and his counsels are used as explanatory of each other.§ The purposes of God are denominated the thoughts of his heart, because they are hid and kept secret from all created intelligences, until he is pleased to reveal them by his oracles, or by the operations of his hand. They are the deep things of God.‖

Sometimes the decrees of God are termed his COUNSELS. "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations. There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the *counsel* of the Lord, that shall stand."¶

* Isa. lv. 8, 9. † Ib. xiv. 24. ‡ Ib. v. 26, 27.
§ Ps. xxxiii. 10, 11. ‖ 1 Cor. ii. 9—11.
¶ Ps. xxxiii. 11, Prov. xix. 21.

"My *counsel* shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."* This term seems designed to represent the consummate wisdom and prudence with which the plans of God have been formed. "Where no counsel is, the people fall; but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety; — he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise;—without counsel purposes are disappointed, but in the multitude of counsellors they are established."† Not that the only wise God, who seeth the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, had any need of advice, or even of deliberation, in forming the plan which has been, and will ever continue to be, the wonder and admiration of holy spirits, and the rule of his own conduct. All possible things appeared to his prescience; or rather, all possible plans were at once before him; and perfect, infinite wisdom chose that which actually exists. But in condescension to our weakness, and in allusion to our method of forming schemes, he has represented his resolutions as the effect of wise counsel. Because "the Lord is wonderful in counsel, he is excellent in working."‡ "His counsels of old are faithfulness and truth."§ They are ancient, even from eternity, in their formation, and are faithfully and truly performed in time. The determinate counsel of God has immutability stamped upon it, and therefore must needs be accomplished.‖ The Bible is a revelation of this counsel, so far as God, in infinite wisdom, has made it known. "The Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves."

* Isa. xlvi. 10. † Prov. xi. 14, xii. 15, xv. 22. ‡ Isa. xxviii. 29.
§ Isa. xxv. 1. ‖ Acts iv. 28; Heb. vi. 17, 18; Eph. i. 11.

The Psalmist said, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel." Paul shunned not "to declare the whole counsel of God."*

The same subject is represented as the PURPOSE of God. Sinners are "called according to his *purpose.*" "Who hath saved us," says Paul, "and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own *purpose* and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."† The whole plan of the gospel is according to his eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus the Lord. The mystery of his will is made known to us according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself.‡ The purpose and the counsel of God involve each other. "Every purpose of the Lord shall be performed."§ The purpose of God, according to election, must stand.‖ "I have purposed it: I will also do it."¶ His purposes are the result of infinite wisdom and unbounded goodness, and are therefore never broken off in the midst, but infallibly take effect. God is fully resolved to execute them.

ORDAIN, and FORE-ORDAIN, are words employed also to express the decrees of God. Thus we read that the believers at Antioch were previously ordained to eternal life.** The meaning of this word in this place is disputed; I shall not, therefore, rest the weight of the doctrine upon it. Did we give up not only *that* text but the very term itself, the doctrine of divine decrees would still rest upon a foundation never to be destroyed. But the term

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* Luke vii. 30; Ps. lxxiii. 24; Acts xx. 27.
† Rom. viii. 28; 2 Tim. i. 9. ‡ Eph. iii. 11; i. 9—11.
§ Jer. li 29. ‖ Rom. ix. 11. ¶ Isa. xlvi. 11. ** Acts xiii. 48.

occurs in other places. Believers are ordained to walk in good works, and Christ is ordained to be judge of quick and dead.* Nay, "verily Jesus was foreordained before the foundation of the world," to be a Saviour by means of his death, "but was manifest in these last times for us."† Hence the gospel, which publishes a free salvation through Christ, and him crucified, is said to be the "wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory."‡ The ordination of God extends not only to moral agents, but to the state, motions, &c. of irrational creatures. The luminaries of heaven are called his ordinances, and the ordinances of Heaven; and the moon and the stars are expressly said to be ordained by him.§ To APPOINT and FORE-APPOINT, as the acts of God, are nearly of the same signification as to *ordain* and to *fore-ordain;* and are only another mode of expressing divine decrees. The Thessalonians "were appointed to obtain salvation by Jesus Christ, being from the beginning chosen in him to salvation, through sanctification of the spirit, and belief of the truth."|| It is appointed, that is *decreed,* for "man once to die, and after this the judgment." There is a house appointed, ordained, or decreed for all living. Jesus is appointed to judge the world, and the day of judgment is also fixed or appointed. There are many other terms employed to signify the decrees, purposes, and fore-appointments of God; such as election, predestination, determinate counsel, the will and plea-

* Eph. ii. 10; Acts x. 42. † 1 Peter i. 20. ‡ 1 Cor. ii. 7.
§ Jer. xxxi. 33; Job xxxviii. 33; Psalm viii. 3.
|| 1 Thess. v. 9; 2 Thess. ii. 13.

sure of God, and the counsel of his will. Some of these terms may be used in reference to different parts or branches of God's decrees, and have a meaning more restricted, or general, according to the connection in which they are found. But the above enumeration, without further enlargement, is sufficient to prove that the Divine Being does not act without plan, design, or intention; but that all HIS works and HIS operations in time, both in providence and grace, are the result and the developement of a purpose, decree, or appointment, formed in his own uncreated mind, before even the earth or the world had an existence. Every thing relating to man's happiness was fixed by his unchanging will:

"His busy thoughts at first
On man's salvation ran,
Ere sin was born, or Adam's dust
Was fashioned to a man." — WATTS.

By whatever words or phrases the divine decrees are represented, not only the idea of their existence, but of the *necessity* of their existence in the divine government, forces itself upon the mind. There must be decrees, or the limited efficient operations of the Creator cannot be accounted for.*

* Something certainly bounds his Almighty power as to what he doth, or else his creation would be infinite, and his works as boundless as his power. Besides, if God work from a plan, that plan must be pre-conceived, and settled in his own mind by an unchanging determination. If God work at all, it must be either from freedom of will, or necessity of nature; as the fire burns, or the water wets. If the latter, then he had no choice, and it would follow that Jehovah himself is the subject of fate, and no praise or glory can be ascribed to him on the ground of anything he has done.—(See Chauncey on Godliness, p. 51.)

SECTION III.

The Properties of the Divine Decrees.

THE decrees of God, to whatever they relate, are the IMMANENT, inherent, internal purposes or resolutions of his own mind. They take rise in his own bosom, without advice, information, or assistance, and are uncaused by any thing out of himself. They are the thoughts of his heart. Were we to view the decree in parts, we might be led to conclude that God decreed one thing in consequence of the existence or decree of another. He, in his all-comprehending mind, clearly foresaw, on the plan he adopted, the introduction of moral evil among his creatures; and, in consequence of that, decreed the removal of sin by the sacrifice of his Son. But, notwithstanding this, the whole plan appears together unto God at one glance, and is one entire decree, including within itself all the parts in which, in its actual accomplishment, it appears to us. This decree is a secret in the breast of Jehovah until he is pleased to divulge it, by revelation or actual accomplishment. Secret things belong to God, and are hid in Him.*

The decrees of God are SOVEREIGN and FREE. He was under no antecedent obligation to form and execute any plan whatever. The existence of the world, of angels, and of men, is the result of a divine choice. All creatures exist through the pleasure of God. None could exist independently of him. Jehovah, in their creation, acted purely as a sove-

* Deut. xxix. 29; Rom. xvi. 26; Eph. iii. 9, 11.

reign.* As supreme Ruler, Lord, and Governor, he is accountable to none; for he has no superior. All his acts are the fruits of his own good pleasure. His will alone gives birth to his decrees, and his decrees give existence to *all he performs*. Sovereignty includes not only supremacy, independence, and uncontrollable power and influence, but (using the word in a good sense) an arbitrary, self-moved power, disposing of persons and events according to his own will. By an act of sovereignty, God chose Israel—preserved Moses—sent his Son into

* It would contribute materially towards a better understanding of the doctrines of salvation and damnation, were the import of the term *sovereignty*, as applied to God, strictly defined and understood. That the great Supreme acts sovereignly in the bestowment of favour cannot reasonably be doubted. All the exercises of his mercy and love to men, in the contrivance and execution of human redemption, are, unquestionably, the fruit and production of his sovereign pleasure. But are there not attributes belonging essentially to Jehovah, to which, and to the exercise of which, the term *sovereign* cannot with propriety be applied? It would not appear congruous to ascribe sovereignty to the immutability, infinity, eternity, omniscience, and omnipresence of God. The same might be said with respect to his moral attributes of justice, holiness, faithfulness, and veracity. Sovereignty implies a freedom and a right to act, or not to act; to exercise, or not to exercise, an attribute according to the will and pleasure of God. In this light we can ascribe sovereignty to the mercy and grace, the love and compassion, of the Lord, and also to the exercises of them. He was at perfect liberty to exercise mercy or not, in the pardon of sin, and in the renovation and sanctification of sinners. But the same cannot be said with respect to his anger and his indignation against sin. He is not at liberty to approve or not approve, to punish or not to punish sin. He *cannot* clear the guilty; nor can he, even in a way of sovereignty, punish beyond what iniquity deserves. *Sovereignty* found a Saviour, but *Justice* only could bruise him, and put him to grief. Jehovah has no choice whether he

the world—saved the dying penitent on the cross—and converted Saul of Tarsus. God displayed his sovereignty in selecting Abraham from among his idolatrous relatives; in choosing Isaac before Ishmael, Jacob before Esau, David to be king before any of his brethren, and in choosing and ordaining Jeremiah to be a prophet, and Cyrus to be his servant, before they were born. Why were all the widows of Israel overlooked, and Elias sent to none of them, save unto Sarepta, a city of Zidon, to a woman that was a widow? or why was Elisha sent

will be just, holy, righteous, true, and faithful. He cannot be otherwise. But it depends upon his will and pleasure whether he will be merciful and gracious to guilty rebels. It was an act of pure sovereignty to save Enoch, Noah, Lot, and Abraham; but the expulsion of the angels from heaven, and the punishment of sinners with everlasting destruction from the presence of God and from the glory of his power, are acts, not of divine sovereignty, but of pure justice. Sovereign grace could have interposed and have confirmed the angels in purity and bliss, and delivered sinners from going down to the pit. Sovereignty itself could not inflict more punishment than was due to the guilty.

Elisha Coles represents the sovereignty of God as consisting in his "absolute power and right of dominion over his creatures, to dispose and determine them as seemeth him good." This he illustrates by creation and providence, the testimony and submission of men and angels, God's own assertions, and his high control of the designs and actions of men; in the conversion of men, and in his ordaining the man Jesus to make his soul an offering for sin, &c. (Coles on God's Sovereignty, pp. 25, 42.)

I have nothing particularly to object to what the good man here remarks; only that there seems to be room for the inference that, as a sovereign, God has a *right* or *power* to curse as well as to bless; to condemn and punish, as well as to justify and save. Whereas divine sovereignty is never exercised, nor can possibly be exercised, in the infliction of evil, but is bounded in its operations by the bestowal of good, or the prevention of misery.

to Naaman, when there were so many lepers in Israel? No answer can be given, but that it was the exercise of divine sovereignty, and on the principle that it is lawful for God to do what he will with his own. These things were done, because God willed them to be done. The same may be affirmed with respect to a thousand instances of divine providence, and also to all the works of his grace. It is even so because it seemed good in his sight. No other reason is assigned for his discriminating conduct. He giveth not account of any of his matters. All his decrees are therefore sovereign, because they are the production of his mere good pleasure, and spring exclusively from his own will. "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy; and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." His determinations, purposes, and counsels, are free, and have not their origin in anything but his own eternal mind. God was under no necessity to create a world, to redeem man, and to people heaven. There was no obligation under which he could be laid. He was alone, and he could not foresee or foreknow any created existences but as he himself determined to give them existence. Repentance, faith, love, and obedience, could not be foreseen in the elect of God, so as to be a motive to their election, because they are the fruits and consequences of that election. Nor could Christ himself be the cause of the decree of election, for he is the effect and gift of divine love to the elect. We are chosen in Christ, but not for Christ. "Thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me." Freedom and sovereignty pervade all the decrees of God. They embrace this and the other object, purely because it is the will of the great Supreme that they

should do so. Hence they are represented as the counsels of his will—as his pleasure, his good pleasure, which he purposed in himself. "Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever, amen." Our God is in heaven, and hath done whatsoever pleased him. "I will do all my pleasure." With respect to all his works, it is said, "For thy *pleasure* they are and were created."* But as all the divine plans are formed by infinite wisdom, it is presumed that there is the utmost fitness and propriety in his sovereign and discriminating dispensations; and that *such fitness* may be his secret reason for the exercise of every such act of divine sovereignty.

The decrees of God are ETERNAL. They were all formed before time commenced. We read of the eternal purpose of God which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. God's works in time are the result of his counsels in eternity. He does nothing now which he did not then determine to do. His perfect knowledge of all his works is founded upon his decree. By infinite prescience he foresaw what was proper to do, and then determined to do it, which determination laid a foundation of certainty for their existence. Sinners believe in time, because they were, before all time, ordained to faith and eternal life. They are saved, and called with an holy calling, not according to their works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given them in Christ before the world began. His decrees must be, like himself,

* See Psalms cxv. 3, cxxxv. 4, 5; Rev. iv. 11; Isa. xlvi. 10.

eternal. No new thoughts or purposes can possibly arise in the infinitely comprehensive mind of Jehovah. He sees the end from the beginning, calling those things that are not, as though they were.* Should there be any new project, purpose, or decree in the divine mind, it would argue the imperfection of God, especially of his knowledge and wisdom, and imply mutability and changeableness. But if God is from everlasting to everlasting the same, without increase or decrease of knowledge, or change of nature and will, such must

* "I lay down this, which I suppose none will deny, that as to God's own actions, God decrees them, or purposes them, before hand. For none will be so absurd as to say that God acts without intentions, or without designing to act, or that he forbears to act without intending to forbear. And whatsoever God intends or purposes, he intends and purposes from all eternity; as there are no new purposes or intentions in God. For, if God begins to intend what he did not intend before, then two things will follow:

"1. That God is not *omniscient.* If God sometimes begins to design what he did not design before, it must of necessity be for want of knowledge, or for want of knowing things before as he knows them now; for want of having exactly the same views of things. If God begins to intend what he did not before intend, it must be because he now sees reasons to intend it that he did not see before, or that he has something new objected to his understanding to influence him.

"2. If God begins to intend or purpose things that he did not intend before, then God is certainly *mutable,* and then he must, in his own mind, be liable to succession and change; for, wherever there are new things, there is succession and change. Therefore I shall take these two things for positions granted and supposed in this controversy."—(President Edwards's Works, vol. viii. p. 392. Leeds Edit.) Thus, according to this able writer, to renounce or deny the *eternity* of divine decrees, is to give up the omniscience and immutability of Jehovah; which is, in effect, to deny his existence, and to say, with the fool, "There is no God."

be his decrees. The decree of election, for instance, was before the foundation of the world, or from the beginning; it was an eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. So Jesus was foreordained to be a Saviour, even from before the foundation of the world. These decrees were before all time, and were the cause of time, and of all that God does in time, or will do throughout eternity.*

Divine decrees are ABSOLUTE and IMMUTABLE. They are sure to take effect. "In the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, there is none that can stay the divine hand, or say unto Jehovah, What doest thou?" The purpose of God according to election must stand. Earth and hell may oppose, but cannot overturn or thwart the designs of the Lord. The decrees of the Medes and Persians were unchangeable; how much more the decrees of God! The foundation of the Lord standeth sure: for the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it. Nothing can occur of which he was ignorant. He can never want power to perform his designs; no unforeseen accident can arise to stop the execution of his decrees. His infinite wisdom and boundless power are engaged to accomplish all his purposes. His counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure. The immutability of his counsel is confirmed by an oath, and cannot be shaken. Mountains of brass are not so firm and unchangeable. "By the brazen mountains," says Beza, "are meant the eternal counsel and providence of God, whereby he hath from

Eph. i. 4, 3, 11; Prov. viii. 20.

before all eternity decreed what shall come to pass, and that which neither Satan nor all the world can alter." If Jehovah does not change, his decrees cannot be altered. But he is without variableness, or the shadow of a change. I am the LORD, I change not. God is not a man, that he should lie, or repent, or change his plans and determinations. I know that what God doeth it shall be for ever; nothing can be put to it nor any thing taken from it. Pilate said, "What I have written I have written;" how much more may the unchanging, immutable I AM say, "What I have purposed I have purposed."

If the decrees of God be eternal and immutable, they must be ABSOLUTE and UNCONDITIONAL; that is, independent of any thing or event out of himself. For, did they depend on any thing out of God, he would not be the first cause and last end of them, but a means subservient to their accomplishment. If the decrees of God were conditional, and the condition not included in the decree itself, but left contingent, then would the fulfilment of God's decrees be uncertain and precarious, which would militate against the omniscience, the power, and the government of God. His foreknowledge would be imperfect, and all his plans might be frustrated. But God is in one mind, and none can turn him; and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth. Hath he said it, and will he not do it? "Many devices are in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of God, that shall stand." Some, indeed, talk of conditional decrees and election; but the scripture seems not to give them countenance. Dr. PIERCE, in his EQUITY OF THE GOSPEL, says, "God absolutely decreed that all who are faithful and repent,

should belong to heaven; and that all who are faithless and impenitent should, in like manner, belong to hell;" but then he leaves the matter unsettled who should believe, and thus suspends the decree, with respect to individuals, upon the performance of conditions. The conditionality of God's decrees is clearly overthrown by Dr. J. Chauncey, by a series of important and weighty arguments.*

The decrees of God, to whatever they relate, are all FOUNDED IN INFINITE WISDOM. They are the deep things of God. Hence they are represented as his counsel,—the deliberate decisions of the only wise God, wherein he has abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence. If angels learn from the church the manifold wisdom of God, it is according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. In the contemplation of the divine decrees, we are constrained to exclaim, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" The reason of his decrees and conduct may not always appear plain to us; still we have abundant cause to believe that what he doeth is all for the best. "God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain." "What I do now thou knowest not, but thou shalt know hereafter."

Finally, the decrees of Jehovah are always EFFECTUAL. They are never repealed by him, nor ever successfully resisted by any being. Satan and wicked men have often attempted to derange the plans, and defeat the purposes, of the Most High,

* On Godliness, p. 57—60.

but have never once succeeded. "Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"* "For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" Men's purposes are often broken off in the midst, but his counsel standeth fast for ever, and the thoughts of his heart from generation to generation. The very means taken to defeat his designs, have been rendered instrumental and effectual for their accomplishment; as in the cases of Joseph and his brethren, and Christ and his murderers. Thus the wrath of man is made to praise him, and the remainder of it he restrains. The persecutors of Stephen intended to stop the preaching of the gospel; but, by the very means they employed, it was preached everywhere. God, in effecting his own designs, taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and turns the counsel of his enemies into foolishness.

* Isa. viii. 10; 1 Cor. i. 20.

CHAPTER III.

THE KNOWLEDGE AND THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

SECTION I.

On the Knowledge of God.

HAVING taken a hasty view of the *existence* and *nature* of divine decrees, it appears necessary to consider, in the next place, what the scripture teaches respecting the *knowledge* and *foreknowledge* of God, and how far they are identified with, or distinguished from, his wise and holy purposes.

The Lord is a God of knowledge. His understanding is infinite and unsearchable. His knowledge is that attribute or perfection of his nature by which he sees every thing with perfect and absolute certainty. It is opposed to every kind and degree of ignorance and doubt. The divine apprehension extends to the very essence and properties of all things, and is founded upon certain and indubitable data, beyond the possibility of error or mistake. It may possibly be distinguished, but must not be separated, from his widom and omniscience.*

* The divine understanding is that whereby God clearly knows, sees, and discerns every truth. (Heb. iv. 13; Ps. xciv. 9; Acts xv. 18.) The divine intelligence, science, sapience, prudence, or art, is comprehended under the attributes of knowledge and wisdom. (1 Sam. ii. 3; Job xxi. 22; Ps. civ. 24; 1 Tim. i. 17.) God sees

Knowledge is essential to the very nature and existence of Jehovah. Ignorance and Deity cannot for one moment be associated.

To prevent misunderstanding, it may be necessary to state that the words *knowledge* and *foreknowledge* are employed, in some texts of scripture, to denote, not simply perception or understanding, but God's love and approbation. "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous,"—that is, he *approves* of it; or, as it is expressed elsewhere, he "delighteth in it." "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and he *knoweth* them that trust in him." "Thou hast *known* my soul in adversity."—"You only have I *known* of all the families of the earth." "The Lord *knoweth* them that are his." The word *foreknowledge* occurs in a similar sense. "Whom he did *foreknow* he also did predestinate." Again: "God hath not cast away his people whom he *foreknew*." Such texts as these express the favour and affection of God; his free, rich, and discriminating grace to his people, as distinguished from those to whom he will address the awful language, "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity, I *know* you not"—"I never *knew* you." Not to *know*, in these places, cannot mean ignorance, for then how could he judge them? It must therefore be restricted to his approbation. His divine intelligence cannot be circumscribed: it extends to all persons and things, whether good or evil. I shall, however, use the words knowledge and fore-

and knows infinitely, eternally, unchangeably, all things and their actions, either possible, future, or present. This is called his omniscience. (Ps. xciv. 11; xliv. 21; cxxxix. 2, 11; Job xxxiv. 21, 22; Chauncey on Godliness, p. 23.)

knowledge, in the subsequent pages, as expressive of understanding, perception, or knowledge, strictly so called.

The knowledge of Jehovah is not an act of his will, but a necessary perfection of his nature. Man's knowledge may be increased, but this, from the absolute perfection of the divine nature, is impossible with God. Without a perfection of knowledge, the happiness of Jehovah would be incomplete. The very supposition of the least degree of ignorance overturns the idea of the divine blessedness. Happiness and ignorance, in the divine mind, are entirely incompatible. His knowledge must of necessity be equal in extent with the immensity of his nature, and the eternity of his existence. Bounds might be set to the omnipresence of God, with the same propriety as to the omniscience of God. As he cannot be absent from any place, so he cannot shut his eye or refrain from seeing. He must know all things, or deny himself. He cannot know more or less than he does know. Infinity and immutability are stamped upon his knowledge and understanding.

The knowledge possessed by angels and men, however deep and extensive, is all derived from the Lord. He is the source of all the intelligence in the universe,—the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. It may therefore be concluded, that he who teacheth man knowledge, must himself possess it.

Adam, and Solomon, and many others, have had an extensive acquaintance with the nature and properties of the works of God, but this was derived from the Lord. Philosophers in our time will scarcely submit to any bounds in their researches

into nature, yet they must acknowledge that all they know is the gift of God.

The omnipotence of God exercised without knowledge might have produced a vast heap of materials without order, regularity, and beauty. There could not have been any discrimination, or any classification of objects, nor any adaptation of things to certain and specific ends. Without a perfection of divine knowledge, Providence would be blind, and all its favours would be ascribable to fortune, fate, or chance. Knowledge and design in the benefactor are requisite to the returns of gratitude and esteem. The infinitude of divine knowledge, intelligence, or wisdom, is displayed in the endless variety of creatures, and in the government of mankind. At the day of judgment the knowledge of God will be manifest, when he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and judge the world with equity, and the people with his truth.

Jehovah knows himself. He perfectly comprehends all the mysteries of his own nature. The Trinity of persons in the Divine Essence, and the mysterious union of two natures in the person of his Son, with all the deep things connected with them, however incomprehensible to finite minds, lie perfectly clear and open to his infinite understanding. His thoughts and his words, which are very deep, and his wonderful works, in all their infinite variety, he perfectly comprehends.

The Lord perfectly understands all intelligent and rational beings. The holy and happy inhabitants of the highest heavens, the Cherubim and Seraphim that fill his temple, and all the spirits of just men made perfect, are collectively and individually known to him. He reads the thoughts of

angels, and sees the malice of devils. Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering. Men of every description, in all parts of the world, in all their diversified circumstances, of riches or poverty, health or sickness, wisdom or folly, honour or reproach, with all their tempers, feelings, and conduct, are visible to his eye, whether they are his friends or his foes, engaged in his service, or employed in opposition to his government. The persons, actions, words, and thoughts of all his rational creatures, are naked and open before him. His power pervades the whole creation, and every minute part thereof, and his knowledge must be co-extensive with his presence and his power. He cannot rule, control, and govern all things, without a perfect acquaintance with all.

The knowledge of God is not only general and universal, including all beings and things, but it is particular and minute. Single out from the objects of his government any one being, event, or circumstance, and he is as intimately acquainted with that, in every respect; as if it were the only one that ever engaged his attention. The hairs of our heads are numbered by him. "The ways of a man are before the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings."

He knows every individual in particular, and all that he has done, said, or thought from his very birth. "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me; thou knowest my down sitting and mine uprising; thou understandest my thoughts afar off; thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge

is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain unto it." Wherever we go he is present to observe us. If we ascend to heaven or make our bed in hell, he is there. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.

"The notion of God's *being every where,* leads our understanding to apprehend that it is as easy for him to observe *every* man as *one* man, and *every* action as *one single* action of our lives; that he, consequently, is as near to our mouth when we speak as the man is who leans his ear to our whispers, as near to our actions when we do any thing in secret as they are whom we admit to our confederacy, and as near to our thoughts when we purpose, wish, or design any thing as our own soul is that conceives them; and, in consequence, that he is familiarly acquainted with them all."*

Not an event has transpired since the creation of the world, nor a volition or thought been experienced by an intelligent creature, nor an action been performed, unknown to Jehovah. Being every where present, nothing has escaped his observing eye.

The knowledge of the Most High is not a mere guess, an uncertain conjecture, founded upon high probabilities, but is absolute and perfect, without any mixture of falsehood, error, or mistake. It is an intuitive perception of things, and of their real, intrinsic, and essential nature and properties. It cannot be increased or diminished. He does not receive his knowledge from any source out of himself. He is the fountain of it to others, but his

* Stackhouse's "Body of Divinity," p. 86, 2nd Ed. Fol.

is underived. "Shall any teach God knowledge?" "Who being his counsellor has taught him?" He knows the truth, with absolute certainty, without study and meditation. He has no occasion to reason and infer, to compound or disjoint ideas, in order to a clear understanding. Such proceedings imply ignorance, and are contrary to the simplicity and absolute perfection of the divine nature. Nor does the Lord learn anything by experience, and by a succession of events, for thus his wisdom and knowledge would increase, and fresh occurrences would make new accessions. This would not accord with the nature of him who is without variableness or shadow of turning.

SECTION II.

On the Foreknowledge of God.

DIVINE knowledge in its universality involves the doctrine of *foreknowledge.* In the all-comprehending mind of Deity there cannot, in strictness of speech, be any *fore* or *after*-knowledge. What he knows now he ever knew. He will not know more when his whole mystery shall be finished, than what he was perfectly acquainted with when he laid the foundations of the earth.

Foreknowledge, according to our conceptions, is a knowledge of events antedated; or an event known previously to its actually taking place. God, on this principle, calls things that be not as though they were. He sees an event with absolute certainty before the actual existence of that event,

and before the reasons for its existence can appear to created beings. Every thing is at once and always present to him. His knowledge is not affected by revolving periods of succession, or permutation, but is the same at all times. Our finite apprehensions compel us to conceive and speak of things as succeeding one another, or as before and after each other, in point of time. In this light the foreknowledge of God is spoken of in adaptation to our weakness. In the divine mind there is no chasm between the events of the creation, and those of the day of judgment. Past, present, and future, are all at once naked and open to the Lord.

Let it not, however, be supposed, that past, present, and future are identified or confounded in the mind of God. He does not conceive of the drowning of the world, the burning of Sodom, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, as if they were events yet to come, or as events taking place at this very instant; nor does he see the restoration of the Jews, the universal diffusion and prevalence of the gospel, in the conversion of all mankind, and the conflagration of the earth and the day of judgment, as events which have already taken place; but he sees things past as past, and things to come as to come. His knowledge comprehends every thing according to truth. Jehovah, inhabiting eternity, and filling immensity, nothing past *goes from* him, nothing future can be distant, so as to *come to* him, and hence every thing *is with* him always. It is impossible he should either lose or gain, forget or learn any thing in point of knowledge.

" The foreknowledge of God is nothing but the wisdom of God under another name, or that idea of

every thing which he had in his mind, to use the language of man, before he decreed any thing." *

Every thing that will transpire from this moment to the general conflagration, lies, at this present time, naked and opened before Jehovah, as much and as certainly as it will do in the day when he shall judge the secrets of men's hearts. His knowledge does not diminish nor augment with the revolving periods of time. Every thing that will be brought into judgment at the last day is perfectly known to him now. All that has taken place since the creation of the world was as well known to him when he laid the foundation of the earth, as at this present moment. It would argue imperfection in God to suppose that he could receive information or grow wiser or increase in knowledge. To him there is nothing old or new, nothing past or future. "Known unto him are all his works," and all his creatures, and all their works, "from the beginning of the world." He cannot be deceived nor disappointed. Every event transpires just as he perceived that it would occur. His foreknowledge is universal, comprehending all things, the greatest and the most minute.†

To deny his infinite and eternal prescience is very

* Milton: "Christian Doctrine," p. 30.

† An old writer mentions three distinctions in relation to the foreknowledge of God. First, he sees what *may* come to pass; secondly, what *shall* come to pass; thirdly, what *will* come to pass. The first he knows by the *perfection* of his nature; the second by the *decree* of his will, giving steady order to things of themselves moveable, that is, to contingencies; the third, by that act of *freedom* seen from everlasting before the will that doth it had a being.—(*Thorndyke.*)

little less than a denial of his eternal power and Godhead.

The numerous predictions with which the Scriptures abound are so many proofs of the foreknowledge of God. Many pages might easily be filled with prophecies that have already had a perfect and minute fulfilment, and with others still to be accomplished. I need not instance in particulars. Every one who owns the Bible to be the word of Jehovah, will readily acknowledge that a large portion of its contents is composed of predictions, and in the history of their exact accomplishment. Only extract from the Scriptures those prophecies which relate to the Jews, to Jesus the Saviour, and to the Christian church, and the History of their fulfilment, and the sacred book would be greatly lessened. But if Jehovah can foretel events hundreds or thousands of years before they take place, he must of necessity foreknow them; and that foreknowledge must be stampt with certainty equal to the certainty of the event.

"The foreknowledge of God," says Dr. Adam Clarke, "is never spoken of in reference to *himself*, but in reference to *us*: in him properly there is neither *fore-knowledge* nor *after-knowledge.—Futurity* and *preteriety* are relative terms to us, but they can have no relation to that God who dwells in every point of eternity, with whom all that is past, all that is *present*, and all that is *future* to man exists in one infinite, indivisible, and eternal NOW."

Whether this language of the learned doctor, respecting the prescience of God, is correct or otherwise, it is far from harmonizing with his own representation of this subject in the same connection. If all that is past, present, and future to man,

comprehend all things, and exist in one eternal NOW with God, how can there be any thing which he does not choose to know? How can his knowledge depend upon his *will* or pleasure to know? If all things exist together, can he close his eyes that he may not see them? Can he be wilfully ignorant? What can the doctor mean by ascribing to God a *power* to know all things? Does the knowledge of God depend upon his will? Can he possess knowledge, or blot it out at his pleasure? "Omniscience, or the power to know all things," says the doctor, "is an attribute of God, and exists in him as omnipotence, or the power to do all things. It does not follow, that because God can do all things, that therefore he must do all things. God is omniscient, and can know all things; but does it follow from this that he must know all things? Is he not as free in the volitions of his wisdom as he is in the volitions of his power?" Such is the language of the doctor; language alike at variance with his own definition of God's foreknowledge, and with common sense, reason, and revelation. If there is, or ever will be, any event that God does not know, how could he know it if he would? To choose whether he will know or not, supposes the event to be before him, or he can have no choice about it; and if it is before him, he must will to be ignorant of that which he cannot avoid knowing, which is absurd, and, I think, amounts to a contradiction.

The learned commentator has unfairly substituted the word *wisdom* in this place for *knowledge*, or *foreknowledge*. They are not strictly synonymous, of which he must be well aware. But provided they might be used synonymously or indiscriminately, I should think it would not follow that Jehovah

could be as free in the volitions (if the term is at all applicable) of his wisdom, knowledge, or foreknowledge, as he is in the volitions of his power. There are some things in the divine nature that do not depend on the act of the divine will. Hence many things are impossible to God. He cannot lie. He cannot deny himself. He cannot be unholy, unjust, unrighteous, and he CANNOT be ignorant. The comparison of power and wisdom, on this subject, is inapplicable, and therefore irrelevant, unless we refer only to their existence, and in that case choice is excluded. For God cannot choose to be impotent or weak, no more than he can choose to be ignorant or foolish. But in regard to their exercise, there is a material difference. God can exert his power, or otherwise, as he pleases; but can the same be said with respect to his wisdom or knowledge? Though it does not follow, from his omnipotence, that therefore God *must needs* do all he can do, yet it does follow, from his omniscience, that he *must needs* know all he can know. The existence and the exercise, if the latter word will apply to the omniscience of Jehovah, are identified. They cannot be separated. A power to know all things is language inapplicable to the Deity, because it supposes some things unknown that yet are capable of being known. How is this reconcileable with omniscience? Suppose we say, "Omnipresence, or a power to be everywhere, is an attribute of God, and exists in him as omnipotence, or the power to do all things," will it follow from hence that God can exclude himself from any place,—that he can choose to be absent, as the doctor supposes that he may choose to be ignorant? There is the same necessity for Jehovah to *know all things*,

as there is for his eternal existence, his universal presence, and his unchanging immutability.*

Indeed, to deny the omniscience and foreknowledge of God, would overturn our ideas of his omnipresence, his infinity, and eternity,† and his qualifications to govern and judge the world, or to be a proper object of confidence to his people. For if God may be ignorant of any future event, that event may strike at the very root of his government, and overturn all his own schemes, and all the hopes of his people.

> "Could time, or could eternity to ought
> Give birth, not present to Jehovah's thought,
> Then where's the guarantee that nought shall rise
> Heaven's counsels to control! and God surprise?"

Such a doctrine would deprive an humble follower of the Lamb of a considerable portion of his consolation under his trials and afflictions. Only

* It is not a little curious and amusing to observe the staunch friend and abettor of Arminianism approximate to the views of hyper-Calvinists, and maintain that the foreknowledge of God depends upon the purpose of his will, or, in other words, upon his decrees. This, however, is not the only point wherein errors of the most opposite systems coalesce.

† It has been said, that as God's power extends only to all things possible, so God's knowledge extends only to all things knowable. To this President Edwards replies, "Things impossible, or contradictions, are not things; but events that come to pass are things. God's power does extend to all things, otherwise it would not be infinite. So neither is the knowledge of God infinite unless God knows all things. To suppose that God cannot do things impossible, does not suppose that God's power can be increased. But to suppose that God does not know men's free actions, does suppose that God's knowledge may be increased."—Edwards's Works, vol. viii. p. 406. Leeds ed.

let him conceive that the *times which pass over him* were not foreseen by the Lord, and how gloomy and melancholy must be his reflections! On this principle, how could he acknowledge the hand of the Lord in his afflictions, or say, with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord"? There might, for any thing we can conceive, be evil in a city, which the Lord had not done, nay, of which he had not the slightest knowledge or expectation. Thus the Christian would be bewildered in a maze of uncertainty, respecting the source, design, and tendency of his trials.

CHAPTER IV.

QUOTATIONS FROM AUTHORS WHO HAVE MAINTAINED THE UNIVERSALITY OF DIVINE DECREES.

The sentiment which I deem incorrect, and which I shall endeavour to disprove, is contained in the following position, namely: "God has fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass." This I conceive is the language of universality. The word "*whatsoever*" includes every event, great and small, good and evil. To exclude any event that has ever taken place, or ever will take place, is to limit the word, and to renounce the opinion. Such limitation, generally acknowledged, would have prevented my writing on the subject. But it will appear that the opinion of many has run on the other side. It has been maintained that all the volitions and actions of intelligent, accountable, moral agents, were unchangeably foreordained of God, and that he is the decretal cause of "*whatsoever* comes to pass." This must undoubtedly include moral evil, and make sin the object of divine appointment; which opinion I conceive to be erroneous and injurious: weakening the motives to obedience, and representing the Holy Lord God as the patron of iniquity.

It may be supposed, by some, that few, if any, authors of acknowledged reputation can be referred to, who have advocated this view of the divine decrees; and that writers and preachers in our own

day would be ashamed to avow the sentiment. It would afford the author great satisfaction should it be proved that he is merely contending with a shadow, but he is compelled, by overwhelming evidence, to believe the contrary. Authors of celebrity, who have been considered truly orthodox, have fully and plainly stated their belief in the *universality* of divine decrees.

SECTION I.

Quotations from the Assembly's Confession of Faith and Catechisms, and from the Expositions given of them, and from other Authors.

I SHALL, in the first place, refer to the Assembly of Divines, as maintaining the doctrine which is here objected to. They, being convened by special authority, met at Westminster, for the purpose of drawing up a Confession of Faith, and Larger and Shorter Catechisms, which might be approved by the Church of England and the Kirk of Scotland, for the purpose of promoting their union. The names of these divines were appended to the work, to the number of about one hundred, besides commissioners from the Kirk of Scotland. Dr. Manton wrote a high recommendation of the production, and quotes also a very favourable testimony from a learned and godly divine, who says, that the Assembly at Westminster were "a synod of as godly, judicious divines, I verily think, as England ever saw." There is also an Epistle to the Reader, extolling the book in terms as high as our language can afford, signed by forty-four divines of the first celebrity in their day. A book thus composed, by

such a union of divines, recommended by the wisest and best men in the empire, intended for universal use in the two kingdoms, and enjoined by the highest authority in the land, may be considered to express very generally the sentiments of all. It is, moreover, a well known fact, that it constitutes the acknowledged summary of the principles, both of preaching and of religious education, in Scotland; and has chiefly been taught in the schools and churches of the dissenters in England. If, then, the sentiment of the universality of divine decrees be found in this book, it would almost seem unnecessary to appeal to any other.

In the Confession of Faith, chapter iii., they say, "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably, ordain *whatsoever* comes to pass." In the Larger Catechism, in answer to the question, "What are the decrees of God?" the following words are employed: "God's decrees are the wise, free, and holy acts of the counsel of his will; whereby, from all eternity, he hath, for his own glory, unchangeably foreordained *whatsoever* comes to pass in time, especially concerning angels and men. In the Shorter Catechism, in answer to the same question, they say, "The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained *whatsoever** comes to pass." Here is the language employed by the Assembly of Divines, and which is taught the rising generation from age to age. Language cannot be more explicit to express the universality

* I have placed the word *whatsoever* in italics, because it expresses universality, and furnishes the very ground of objection.

of the decrees. "*Whatsoever comes to pass*" must literally and necessarily include moral evil as well as good. Had these decrees been restricted to what is good, no objection could have been formed against them ; but when God is said to have "foreordained *whatsoever* comes to pass," it makes all the sins of mankind to be the object and fruit of his decrees. Shall we conceive that God foreordained that Cain should murder Abel?—that Israel should make a golden calf?—and that Herod should slay the children of Bethlehem? These are things that have come to pass ; and in all ages up to the present time, murder, theft, adultery, blasphemy, and innumerable crimes have been perpetrated ; and dare we say that they have taken place in number, nature, circumstance, time, and place, by the appointment and ordinatio n God?

This Assembly of Divines have not informed us, in so many words, that they intended to include moral evil in "whatsoever comes to pass;" but so their language has been interpreted by their Expositors.

"Several ministers," of the Kirk of Scotland, collected materials for the Exposition of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism, "and it was recommended to *three* of their number," namely, the Rev. Ebenezer Erskine, the Rev. Ralph Erskine, and the Rev. James Fisher, "to revise what should be done by so many hands, that there might be an uniformity of style and method, and that repetitions might be avoided as much as possible." In this explanation, which fills a large volume, the third edition of which was published in 1777, we may reasonably expect to find the sentiments generally maintained by the

most respectable and most influential, learned, and pious divines in Scotland. On the subject of divine decrees, then, they thus write:—

"*Question* 21.—Doth any thing come to pass in time, but what was decreed from eternity?

"*Answer.*—No: for the very reason why anything comes to pass in time, is because God decreed it. Eph. i. 11; Acts xv. 18.*

"*Q.* 23.—What has the decree of God fixed with respect to man's continuance in this world?

"*A.*—It has immovably fixed the precise moment of every one's life and death, with every particular circumstance thereof.†

"*Q.* 28.—Is the permissive decree a bare inactive permitting of evil?

A.—No: It determines the event of the evil permitted, and overrules it to a good end, contrary to the intention both of the work and worker.

"*Q.* 30.—How can the decree of God be permissive and efficacious at the same time?

"*A.*—It is permissive with respect to the *sinfulness* of the action as a moral evil, and efficacious with respect to the matter of it as a natural act.‡

"*Q.* 1. What is it for God to execute his decrees?

"*A.* It is to bring them to pass, or give an actual being in time to what he purposed from eternity.

"*Q.* 2. Doth not God leave the execution of his decrees to second causes?

"*A.* Whatever use God may make of second causes in the execution of his decrees, yet they are but tools in his overruling hand, to bring about his

Part i. p. 61. † Ibid. pp. 61, 62. ‡ Ibid. p. 62.

glorious designs; they are his servants, and must do all his pleasure."*

"*Q.* 20. Does God's governing providence include in it his immediate *concurrence* with every action of the creature?

"*A.* Yes. God not only efficaciously concurs in producing the action as to the matter of it, but likewise predetermines the creature to such or such action, and not to another (Isa. x. 6, 7); shutting up all other ways of acting, and leaving that only open which he had determined to be done. (Ezek. xxi. 21, 22)."†

Here, then, we have the unveiled sentiment of these worthy divines unequivocally expressed. They expound the language of their Creed and Catechism, as including all events, without exception, in the sovereign decrees of God. "If any of their ministers teach doctrines contrary thereto, they are sure of being thrown out of their communion."‡

The Rev. Michael Arthur, minister of the gospel at Edinburgh, published three octavo volumes of Expository Lectures upon the *Assembly's Shorter Catechism*, in which he, upon the point before us, uses the following language:—"To each of the creatures, and to each of their actions, do the divine decrees extend."§ "That evil actions, no less than good, are determined to be, I am to evince from the Scriptures."|| "What he hath determined, he

* Assembly's Shorter Catechism Explained, Part i. p. 63.
† Part i. p. 77.
‡ History of Dissenting Churches, by W. Wilson, vol. i. p. 522.
§ Arthur's Lectures on the Shorter Catechism, vol. i. p. 182.
|| Ibid. p. 188.

either hath done, or he will infallibly do." "The great God executes his own decrees." "He executes all his decrees."* "Every event that happens was forordained from eternity. But in the divine purpose the end and the means are connected. When, therefore, the end is to be accomplished, means are used and rendered subservient to it."†

The reader will here observe that God is represented as having decreed "evil actions," and that he does them. For "what he hath determined, he either hath done, or will do: he executes all his decrees." Can such language be tolerated respecting Him who "is of purer eyes than to behold evil," who "hath no pleasure in wickedness," and who "hates all workers of iniquity"? Others, and not a few, have, however, employed language not less obnoxious or reprehensible. "All things come to pass by the efficacious and irresistible will of God."‡

"*Q.* What is a decree?

"*A.* Foreordaining what, and in what manner, things shall come to pass.

"*Q.* What hath God decreed and foreordained?

"*A.* All things that come to pass (Acts xv. 18)."§

"Predestination is the decree which unalterably settles the eternal state of angels and men, and the means thereof (Rom. ix. 22, 23; 1 Tim. v. 21)."

"God fully executes his decrees by doing what

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* Arthur's Lectures on the Shorter Catechism, vol. i. p. 193.

† Ibid. pp. 268, 269.

‡ Assembly's Catechism, chap. v.

§ How little to the purpose is this text. It speaks only of God's own works, and only of his knowledge, not of his decrees at all.

he purposed in the decree. He worketh all things according to the counsel of his will."*

The Assembly's Catechism has had more expositors than any other human composition with which I am acquainted, *The Pilgrim's Progress* not excepted; and among all its expounders, I know of none, save Dr. Watts and the Rev. Samuel Pike, who have not explained the decrees of God in the widest latitude, including moral evil as well as good. Dr. Watts, upon the phrase, "*Foreordained whatsoever comes to pass,*" gives this explanation—"Appointed to bring to pass all that is good, and to permit all that is evil."

I will proceed to transcribe the language which other authors have employed upon this important point.

"God hath, in his decrees, unchangeably foreordained whatsoever comes to pass: nothing comes to pass in time but what, and when, and how, God hath ordained in his decrees: nothing comes to pass which doth not serve to God's glory, or which was not intended by God for that end: God hath foreseen that sin would be; nay, more, God hath foreordained that sin should be: God doth concur to the action that is sinful; and sin always turns to God's glory: God, the creator of all things, doth uphold and preserve all creatures, actions, and things, even from the greatest to the least: God's providence extends itself to the sins of men and angels."†

* Brown on Assembly's Catechism, Art. *Decrees.*

† Thomas Lye: Explanation of the Assembly's Catechism, Art. *Decrees.* London, 1676. In the above quotation, the interrogatory form has been changed, but the words and sense have been retained.

"God hath determined, purposed, ordained, or willed from all eternity, all things that have, do, or shall come to pass." "God hath decreed all things concerning men, as to their temporal, spiritual, and eternal state; and there is nothing that can be found that God's decree doth not reach; therefore God hath decreed all things whatsoever."*

"The same thing as done by men might be very wicked, but as done by God, holy, just, and righteous." "It is plain, then, that God's providence doth also reach the most simple actions of men, yet he himself is infinitely pure."†

"What things are decreed of God? Answer—All things whatsoever come to pass, even the smallest."‡

Other writers, both ancient and modern, whose works generally are held in high estimation, have also very plainly stated their belief in this sentiment.

"God hath decreed in himself, before the world was, concerning all things, whether necessary, accidental, or voluntary, with all the circumstances of them, to *work*, dispose, and bring about all things, according to the counsel of his own will, to his glory."§

"God did, before all time, by his unchangeable counsel, ordain whatsoever afterwards should come to pass."‖ "All things whatsoever should in time come to pass, with every small circumstance ap-

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* *Doolittle*, on the Assembly's Catechism, Art. *Decrees*. London, 1673.

† Ibid. on *Providence*.

‡ *Flavel*, on the Assembly's Catechism, Art. *Decrees*.

§ Confession of Faith of seven churches, commonly, but unjustly, called Anabaptists. 1646.

‖ Usher's Principles of the Christian Religion.

pertaining thereunto, was ordained to be so from all eternity, by God's certain and unchangeable counsel."*

* Usher's Motives, &c. 1678.

"God made Adam and Eve to this very purpose, that they might be tempted and led into sin. And by the force of this decree it could not be otherwise but that they must sin." "All things are done by the decree of God, and therefore all things are done of necessity. Judas betrayed Christ by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." "We can neither do more good than we do, nor less evil than we do, because God from eternity has precisely decreed that both the good and the evil be so done."—(*Piscator.*)

I cannot suppress my painful feelings while I transcribe such language. Were the sentiment correct, ought not all blame to be for ever withheld from creatures?

"The reprobates being destitute of God's grace, and left to their own nature, as they cannot but sin, they cannot but perish, unto which double necessity the reprobates are predestinated."—(*Sturmius.*)

"The Lord, according to his absolute and uncontrollable sovereignty, has made decrees and statutes concerning man, both as to the end, and all those means which lead thereto."—(*Caryl,* on Job, xxviii. 26.) On this principle, the sin, and the occasion and means of sin, are all considered as the fruit and effect of a divine decree.

"The decree is an action of God, out of the counsel and purpose of his own will, determining all things, and all the circumstances and order of all things, from all eternity, in himself, certainly and unchangeably. The execution of the decree is an act of God, whereby God doth effectually work in time all things as they were foreknown and decreed. This action of God is external, and by a temporal act passing from God to the creatures."—(*Ambrose;* Looking to Jesus, book ii. chap. i. sect. 2.)

"The Almighty power of God extends itself to the first fall and to all other sins of angels and men."—(*Twiss.*) "God decreed men's damnation before he decreed to create them."—(*Perkins.*) "There is a higher cause of all things than prescience and prediction—to wit, the good-will and pleasure and decree of God. For the first cause of the

That Calvin has been greatly instrumental in the propagation of this sentiment, the following quotations are sufficient to prove :—

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event of everything is God's decree.—In God's decree are set down, not only the things to be done, but also the means and circumstances thereof.—Take heed of the opinion of some protestants, which hold and teach that sundry things come to pass, God only foreseeing them, and no way decreeing them, as, namely, sin. But to give unto God a bare foreknowledge, without a decree, is to put upon him an idle providence, which the nature of God will not admit." * "Nothing comes to pass without the decree of God; no, not the wicked actions of men, which God not only foreseeth, but decreeth."†—"The providence of God is his decree, by which he appointeth how every thing shall come to pass."‡—"In nature, the first cause ordereth the second causes, not the second the first. Now God's will is the cause of all causes, which, therefore, must rule all as supreme."§

"God's first constitution was that some should be destined to eternal ruin; and to this end their sins were ordained, and a denial of grace in order to their sins."‖ "Both the reprobate and the elect were pre-ordained to sin as sin."—(*Zanchy.*) "God's predestination binds whom he pleases, not only to damnation, but to the causes also of damnation." (*Beza.*) "God did from eternity decree the commission of all the sins of the world."¶ "All the foreknowledge of future things is founded in the decree of God."**

"There is a decree or pre-ordination, not only a naked foresight of those that perish. Some Lutherans say that predestination is only proper to the elect, but as to the reprobates there is only a prescience or naked foresight, no pre-ordination, lest they should make God the author of the creature's sin and ruin; but these men fear where no fear is."†† "If God may ordain men to hell for

* Perkins, on Rev. iii. 10. In the same place he ascribes the persecution under Trajan to the eternal counsel of God.

† Ibid. on Jude, v. 4.

‡ Ibid. Solutions, &c.

§ Ibid. upon Jude, v. 2. To the same purpose, see Witsius on the Covenants, vol. i. book i. chap. 8.

‖ Zanchius, de Naturo Dei, pp. 553, 554.

¶ Edwards, as quoted by Scott against Mr. Edward Parsons.

** Witsius on the Covenants, vol. ii. book iii. c. 4.

†† Manton, on Jude.

" All men are made guilty of Adam's sin by God's absolute decree alone. Adam therefore sinned by this decree alone. God may with as much justice decree men's damnation out of his own will and pleasure, as out of his mere will and pleasure decree to involve men in the first sin, and their damnation for it."* " Nothing is more absurd than to think any thing at all is done but by the ordination of God."† " Every action, and motion of every thing, is so governed by the secret counsel of God, that nothing comes to pass but what was ordained by him."‡ " Those poisonous dogs vomit out many things against God. They deny that the scripture says God decreed Adam's fall."§ " The wicked sin and perish, not by God's permission only, but by his will and appointment."|| " There is no doubt but that both preparations" (viz., of the elect to glory, and the reprobates to destruction) " depend upon the secret counsels of God. Paul signifies they

Adam's sin, which is derived unto them from God's constitution only, he may as well do it absolutely without any such constitution."—(*Twiss.*)

" The decree of God is one and uniform in the fountain,—one pure act decreeing all things that shall come to pass, without any motion thereto from the creature. Nothing can be contingent to God, for he hath absolutely decreed whatsoever comes to pass, that necessary things shall act necessarily, and contingent things contingently, but certainly according to his decree. Rom. ix. 15, 16."—(Chauncey on Godliness. Lond. 1701.)

Large quotations to the same purpose might be made from the works of Dr. John White, especially from " The Way to the True Church," p. 138, &c. 1624; but it does not appear necessary.

* Calvin, Inst. b. ii. See him also on Rom. xi. 7.
† Ibid. b. i. chap. xvi. sec. 8. ‡ Ibid. sec. 3.
§ Ibid. b. iii. chap. xxiii. sec. 2 & 7. || Ibid.

(the reprobates) are already assigned to their lot before they were born."*

SECTION II.

Quotations from writers of the last and present centuries.

LEST the reader should suppose that modern writers have steered clear of this dangerous point, and that there is no necessity in the present day to wield a pen against it, it may be important to make a few quotations from works published in the last and present centuries.

"This *blindness* designs their unbelief, the hardness of their hearts, and the darkness of their understandings with respect to God himself." "This blindness *happened* to them, not by chance, but befel them by the decree, and according to the will, of God, who hardens whom he pleases, and according to various predictions in the Old Testament." †

"Every thing that comes to pass in this world, from the beginning to the end of it, is pre-ordained; every thing, good and bad."‡ Any one acquainted with the writings of Dr. Gill need not be told that many pages of a similar strain might easily be extracted from them. (See his Cause of God and Truth, vol. ii. p. 144, &c.)

"As all things were originated, are preserved, directed, and controlled by God, so it is plain that they all come to pass exactly according to his plea-

* Calvin on Rom. ix. 23. † Dr. Gill on Rom. xi. 25.
‡ Dr. Gill. Body of Divinity, Art. *Decrees.*

sure;—that all things, both beings and events, exist in exact accordance with the purpose, pleasure, or what is commonly called the decrees of God."* This worthy author employs two discourses on the proof of the doctrine, that all beings and events are what they are by the decree or appointment of God. In these discourses there are many important thoughts, and much acute reasoning, managed with the greatest dexterity and plausibility. But when the arguments are analyzed, they are either sophistical, or they go to prove the doctrine of fate or necessity. The reader, however, must judge for himself.

The expounder of the Baptist Catechism must be numbered among those who advocate the universality of God's decrees. He maintains "that God has predetermined all future events;—that nothing can come to pass by chance;—that God's decrees extend not only to the conduct of good men, but to the conduct of wicked men, and to their destruction;—that nothing will come to pass that God hath not decreed;—that God executes his own decrees,—that his providence extends to evil actions;—and that he can bring good out of evil."†

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* Dwight's System of Theology; on *Decrees.*

† Beddome's Scriptural Exposition of the Baptist Catechism, pp. 25—28.

The late Vicar of St. Martin's, Leicester, the Rev. Edward T. Vaughan, M.A., published a sermon in 1823, entitled, "*God the Doer of all things.*" There are assertions in this discourse sufficient to make one tremble, and yet they are only what are legitimately derived from the doctrine that *God has decreed* WHATSOEVER *comes to pass.* He styles the Supreme Being "the Restless Worker who doeth all things." (p. 33) He affirms, "there is not one work, good or bad, suggested or performed, but what is

It appears to me somewhat extraordinary, that the late excellent Andrew Fuller, if his biographer has not misrepresented him, should have entertained the notion, that God has decreed all the sin that has ever been or will be committed. "As sin has in fact entered, prevailed, and reigned upon earth, he (Mr. Fuller) was satisfied that it could be no reproach to the holy Majesty of heaven and earth to decree what has actually taken place."*

There is an article in the *Congregational Magazine* for Nov. 1825, supporting the universality of the divine decrees, in opposition to the sentiments of the late Dr. Williams of Rotherham, by which it appears that the conductors of that journal approve the notion that God decreed the existence and prevalence of moral evil among angels and men; or, in the words of the Assembly's Catechism, that God

according to his will; yea, in obedience to, and fulfilment of it." (p. 1.) He makes the following inquiries:—"But is God equally guiltless and sinless in having continued to do the creature's sin? (p. 31.) "And why are we to be frightened with the bugbear and watchword of making God the author of sin? Is it not obvious that he must, *in some sense*, be the author of it? For how has it got into his creation without him, when the whole frame, and relations, and circumstances of the creature are *of*, and *from*, and *to* him? But it is equally obvious that there is a sense in which he is not the author of it. He has *willed*, he has *wrought*, but he has not *inspired* it." (p. 25, &c.) In a note, however, he informs us that he does not prefer the phrase, *God is the author of sin*;—"Originator," says he, "is what I should rather have chosen." Ascribing to God the permission of sin does not satisfy Mr. Vaughan. This is the point controverted in his sermon. He affirms that God does not merely permit, but that he wills, works, and stimulates to sin.—(See the *Eclectic Review* for Dec. 1824.)

* Fuller's Memoirs, by J. W. Morris, p. 268.

has "unchangeably foreordained *whatsoever* comes to pass."

The late Mr. Tucker, of Chard, published a volume, written expressly upon the doctrine of predestination. This work was recommended to my consideration by the late Dr. Ryland of Bristol, as abundantly proving that God has decreed every event that takes place. To make quotations from this book, in support of the sentiment that God has ordered and appointed all things, even sin itself, would be to transcribe the greater part of the whole book. I shall only refer to a few positions which it contains. "God is the first cause of all events," (pp. 8, 16, 77.) "All things, without exception, are the effect of his will and choice." This is repeated again and again (pp. 29, 78, 91, 107, 114.) "God wills whatever is done (pp. 67, 71), and his will is himself, his essence," (pp. 35, 53, 55, 91, 102, 104, 158, 160.) I cannot forbear breaking the thread of these references to remark, that if this be correct, it will follow that sin itself is essential to the very nature and being of God. Awful doctrine! Pardon, friendly reader, this interruption. "God approves of sin, and works it, (pp. 82, 83, 85.) Every sin is ordained of God (pp. 112, 113), or could not be foreknown, (pp. 99, 112, 113.) Sin is fixed (p. 88) and willed by the Lord (pp. 120, 121); yea, every thought and volition, (p. 192.) Sin tends to the glory of God (p. 193), and works together for good, (p. 222.) In a word, God is the author of sin," (pp. 119, 131, 138, 158.)

The positions here referred to are insisted on at large in the work, and much argument is employed for their proof and confirmation. How far the author has succeeded, his readers must judge. In

my opinion he has utterly failed, though I am aware that reviewers have deemed the work an unanswerable vindication of the doctrine of divine predestination.*

Though the reader, like myself, may be completely satiated with quotations of the above description, yet I entreat him just to read another from the pen of an eminent author, who ought to have been placed in company with those of his own times. I refer to Archbishop Leighton, who has expressed his views upon the point before us in the following manner:—

"Nothing at all is *futurum*, or can have that imagined *futurition*, but *as* it is, and *because* it is decreed by God to be.

"This foreknowledge, then, is his eternal and unchangeable love; and that thus he chooseth some and rejecteth others, is for that great end, to manifest and magnify his mercy and his justice. But why he appointed this man for the one, and the other for the other—made Peter a vessel of this mercy, and Judas of wrath—this is even so because it seemed good to him. This, if it be harsh, yet is apostolic doctrine. 'Hath not the potter' (saith St. Paul) 'power over the same lump to make one ves-

* All these advocates of illimitable decrees may be confronted with the judgment of the author of "Paradise Lost." "It appears, therefore, from these passages of scripture (Gen. xix. 17, 21; Ex. iii. 8, 17, iv. 24; 1 Sam. ii. 30, xiii. 13, 14; 2 Kings, xx. 1; 2 Chron. xxxv. 22; Jer. xviii. 9, 10, xxxvi. 3, xxxviii. 17; Jonah, iii. 4; Acts xxvii. 21, 31), and from many others which occur of the same kind, to the paramount authority of which we must bow, that the most high God has not decreed all things absolutely."—*Milton's Christian Doctrine*, p. 33.

sel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?' This deep we must admire, and always, in considering it, close with this—' O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God.' "*

" '*Whereunto also they were appointed.*' This the apostle adds for the further satisfaction of believers in this point, how it is that so many reject Christ, and stumble at him, telling them plainly that the secret purpose of God is accomplished in this, having determined to glorify his justice on impenitent sinners, as he shews his rich mercy in them that believe. Here it were easier to lead you into a deep than to lead you forth again; I will rather stand on the shore and silently admire it, than enter into it.

" To give causes of God's decrees without himself, is neither agreeable with the primitive being of the nature of God, nor with the doctrine of the Scriptures. This is sure, that God is not found to give us further account of these things, and we are bound not to ask it. Let these two words (as St. Augustine says) answer all—' *What art thou, O man?*' (Rom. ix. 20); and, ' *O the depth!*' (Rom. xi. 33.)"†

These extracts, I imagine, will be deemed quite sufficient to prove that I am not contending with feigned, but real opponents. The works of these authors are generally approved by reputed Calvinists. The name imports that in his leading views Calvin is deemed orthodox. His *Institutes* are the acknowledged creed of a large body of dissenters.

* Archbishop Leighton, on 1 Peter, i. 2. If such were his views of divine decrees, he might well forbid his pupils to investigate them. See p. 4 of this work.

† Archbishop Leighton, on 1 Peter, ii. 7, 8.

If, then, the dissenters, or a large body of them, maintain that God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, including moral evil, as well as good, it cannot be undesirable to put the sentiment to the test of the Holy Scriptures.

Authors and ministers now living or lately deceased, of high respectability in the religious world, might be referred to as advocates of the sentiment here oppugned. Some of them have declared that "there has not been a volition in the human mind since Adam was created, but by the premotion of God." A denial of this has been represented as an approach to Atheism. "On your plan, Sir," said one, "there is no God. You deny the being and perfections of Jehovah, if you deny that anything takes place which he did not decree."

So far as we have the means of knowing their history, the authors from whose works quotations have been made were men of sincere piety and veracity; of sterling talents and sound learning. The very names of many of them inspire respect and veneration. We cannot speak of Calvin and Beza, of Caryl and Doolittle, of Gill and Toplady, without a conviction of their worth, their general greatness and excellencies. But however high our opinion of the teachers of religion, in ancient or modern times, we should ever remember that our creed must be exclusively derived from the Holy Scriptures, that our "faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

Whatever were the wisdom and piety of these writers, they were not infallible; and therefore their creed should not be implicitly adopted. Luther and Calvin, Gill and Toplady, Wesley and Whitefield, must alike give place to the oracles of

God. I very readily acknowledge my obligations for the benefits I have received from the writings of many of the authors mentioned, and shall be happy to do this when introduced to their society in heaven; but I dare not blindly follow them, nor, in matters of religion, call any man Master. I trust that I feel a deep consciousness of my own weakness and inferiority of talent, but I do not conceive that I am therefore to yield up my judgment to opinions and doctrines which appear to me in opposition to the Bible. Men and names, in point of authority, are all upon a level where the character of God, and the concerns of eternal truth, are the objects of investigation. Human injunctions will not be admitted in justification of erroneous sentiments. No book but one can justly demand implicit faith and unqualified approbation. We are always safe in listening to Moses and the prophets, to Christ and his apostles. "Search the Scriptures," said the Author of our religion. From them there lies no appeal. Our creed and conduct should accord with the Book by which we must be judged, and approved or condemned, at the last day. We do well to take heed to the more sure word of prophecy, and to bring all our religious opinions to the law and to the testimony.

To the paramount authority of the Holy Scriptures very few will object; yet there is a lamentable proneness in human nature to subvert that authority, by receiving for truth the opinions of men. A sentiment is often avowed in theory which is abjured and renounced in practice. Warmly attached to the leading views of some great and good men, their very blemishes and errors are indiscriminately received by their followers with their beauties and

excellencies. Judging them correct in the most important doctrines of the gospel, their whole system is embraced without that patient investigation and cool examination which are necessary to separate the chaff from the wheat. "Exorbitances of doctrine, when advanced by men of powerful or richly furnished minds, conceal their deformity and evil tendency beneath the attractions of intelligence."* A single fly in a pot of ointment, though unperceived and unsuspected, may produce very pernicious effects; even so one single point of erroneous doctrine, in a system of divinity, may have a very unhappy and injurious influence upon the whole. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Those errors which vitally affect the system of natural and revealed truth, ought to be boldly opposed, though embraced by the many, the great, and the learned. Truth is not to be determined by names and numbers. She is often found, at present, in the minority; but she will ultimately prevail and triumph over all opposition.

It may not be improper now to observe, that the following sentiment is that against which I enter my protest, and hope to remove, by scriptural arguments, from the minds of my readers:—*That God, for his own glory, hath from all eternity unchangeably foreordained, appointed, and absolutely decreed every event that ever transpires within his dominions, as well and as certainly the evil as the good, the misery as well as the happiness of his creatures.*

This *opinion*, so repeatedly asserted in the above quotations, I consider as opposed to the whole

* Hist. of Enthusiasm, 2nd edit. p. 85.

tenor of the Bible, to the accountability of man, and the righteous government of God. That God decreed all the good that ever was found in his dominions, or ever will be found among his creatures, angels or men,—all the good that ever was done, or enjoyed by any or all of them,—I verily believe. Nothing of this kind ever did or will take place but by his own influence. He decreed, and he effects, produces, and works all that is good, in the most extensive and absolute sense of the word. Neither man nor angel performs any acceptable work, nor possesses any excellency, natural or supernatural, but as it was decreed and has been effected by him who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will.

But with respect to moral evil, I think far otherwise. As "God cannot be tempted with evil," so "neither tempteth he any man." "Out of the mouth," or purpose, "of the most High, proceedeth not evil and good." This "fountain doth not send forth at the same place, sweet water and bitter, salt water and fresh." All evil originates with the creature, all good with God. This cannot be affirmed if sin is included in God's decrees. The notion is calculated to overturn the idea of man's responsibility, to lessen or annihilate his guilt, to embolden him in transgression, and to represent the Father of mercies, and the Fountain of holiness, as the patron and president of iniquity.

CHAPTER V.

THE PRINCIPAL ARGUMENT IN FAVOUR OF THE UNLIMITED EXTENT OF THE DIVINE DECREES STATED AND REFUTED.

In support of the unlimited extent of the divine decrees, it is contended, "that the foreknowledge of God is founded upon his decrees; and as the former is confessedly universal, the latter must of necessity be of the same extent."

This is the principal argument insisted upon by those who maintain that God's decrees are universal. "The foreknowledge of God," say they, "to be absolutely sure, must have a secure and certain foundation: but there is no certain ground of any future event apart from God's unchanging decree, and therefore nothing can be positively foreknown that is not made certain by divine appointment. If all things are not decreed, then all things are not certain, and what is not certain cannot be the object of absolute foreknowledge. Divine foreknowledge, therefore, being founded upon divine decrees, they must in point of extent be identified, and amount to one and the same thing."

From writers who have maintained that the prescience and predestination of God are identified, the following quotations are presented:—

"The predestination of the Calvinists," said Dr. Ryland, "necessarily follows upon the prescience

allowed by the Arminians."* "If God only foreknew all things that relate to all men, and did not decree and ordain them also, then it might be inquired whether or not his foreknowledge necessitate the thing foreknown. But seeing he therefore foreknows all things that will come to pass, because he has decreed they shall come to pass, it is vain to contend about foreknowledge, since it is plain all things come to pass by God's positive decree."† "The Deity, from all eternity, and consequently at the time he gave life and being to the reprobate, certainly foreknew, and knows, in consequence of his own decrees, that such a one would fall short of salvation; now if God foreknew this, he must have determined it, because his own will is the foundation of his decrees, and his decrees are the foundation of his prescience; he therefore foreknew futurities, because by his predetermination he hath rendered their futurition certain and inevitable."‡

"I confess that it is indeed a horrible decree; no one, however, will be able to deny but that God foreknew what would be the end of man before he formed him, and he therefore foreknew it, because he had so ordained by his own decree."§

* Baptist Mag., Sept. 1822.

† Calvin, Inst. b. iii. chap. 23, sect. 6.

‡ Toplady. Did this good man really believe that it was *not sin*, but the *mere will* of God, that rendered the damnation of sinners "certain and inevitable"?

§ Calvin, Inst. b. iii. chap. 24, sect. 12.

Even the learned and amiable Saurin gives countenance to the same conclusion. After having declared that the decrees of God are abstruse and beyond the reach of the human mind, he observes, that "to foresee and to foreappoint in God is only one

The Calvinists, either justly or unjustly, are represented as saying, "God cannot see things but as he decrees them, and so gives them a futurition, and therefore a prescience, antecedent to his decree, they reject as a thing impossible."**

"All things are the objects of the decrees of God, because they are the objects of his knowledge."

and the same thing."* "This assertion," says a respectable author, which "is equally bold and unguarded, shews plainly that his mind was greatly perplexed on the subject of prescience and decree, and on the mode of reconciling them."†

The late Robert Robinson, of Cambridge, adopted similar language—"He from all eternity foresaw and foreordained (which, when we speak of God, is the same thing) what would be the end of all things."‡

"No one circumstance, good or bad, even the least, can take place in time which was not decreed from all eternity; for if it were, the prescience of God would be impeached."§

I may just remark, that this author, in the latter part of the sentence, has substituted the word *prescience* instead of *decrees*, and thus takes for granted the point to be proved, namely that God cannot foreknow what he has not decreed, or that the words *prescience* and *decrees*, in point of extent, may be used synonymously.

"The sentiment is *assumed* by many celebrated divines and philosophers, that there is no ground of *certainty* but from a positive cause, a divine decree."‖

"God's knowledge of things that are, or shall be, is founded on his determinate counsel and will, whereby things are brought from a mere state of possibility into futurition, and it is called the knowledge of vision, Acts xv. 18; Ps. cxxxix. 2, xxxiii. 13; Prov. xv. 3; Job xxii. 12, 13, &c."¶

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* Saurin's Sermons, vol. v., sermon 11.

† Dr. Williams's Equity and Sovereignty, p. 20. 3rd edition.

‡ Notes to Claude's Essay, vol. ii. p. 336.

§ Rev. J. Hawker, as quoted by Mr. Cottle.

‖ Dr. Williams's Essay, p. 76. 3rd edit.

¶ Chauncey on Godliness, p. 23. London, 1700.

** Stackhouse: Body of Divinity, p. 151. 2nd edit. folio.

"That God has an eternal knowledge of all things, needs not now to be proved. But the question is, whether he knows them in consequence of his having decreed and determined their existence and effects." "His having determined them must be the source both of their certain existence and of his own immutable knowledge." "God knows that such and such things will be, because he has determined in his will that they shall be." "We must conclude that God must have determined all existences and all events before (in order of nature) he could know them."* "God forsees nothing but what he has decreed, and his decree precedes his knowledge."†

To complete this argument, it is urged, "that as the decrees of God are absolute and unchangeable, and his foreknowledge, founded upon them, stamped with infallible certainty, every event and circumstance foreknown must inevitably take place as foreknown, or the prescience of Jehovah is overthrown. If the omniscience of God be overturned, he will be reduced to the level of the idols, who are challenged to 'do good or evil, to shew things to come, that we may know that they are gods.' If the foreknowledge of God is universal, minute, and absolutely certain, things cannot happen differently to what they are foreseen, and therefore this irrefragably identifies prescience with predetermination."

I have thus represented the subject as fairly and as fully as I can, and have produced quotations quite sufficient to shew the nature of the doctrine

* Tucker, on Predestination, pp. 45, 46, 48. 3rd Edit.

† Piscator.

which is advocated by many, and the kind of argument by which it is supported.

This being the most general defence of the unlimited extent of divine decrees, and considered the most cogent, powerful, and conclusive argument in favour of that sentiment, the reader's patience and candour in the consideration of it are particularly requested. If this position be demolished, the foundation is removed. If this cannot be overthrown, it will be unnecessary to proceed further. In prosecuting the inquiry whether the prescience and the decrees of God are of the same extent, and whether the former is bounded by the latter, it will be necessary to examine the grounds of divine prescience and of divine decrees.

SECTION I.

The Divine Prescience founded in part upon Divine Decrees.

Divine prescience, or foreknowledge, is comprehensive, and without limits, and perfect without deficiency; and to the extent of Jehovah's *own* operations, it is founded upon his own decrees. He that knows what God has decreed, must of course know, in that respect, what will undoubtedly come to pass. His decrees will be exactly, minutely, and circumstantially accomplished. "His counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure." In the order of things, God could not certainly foreknow his own works till he had determined to perform them. His foreknowledge of the worlds, their number, na-

ture, extent, inhabitants, and duration, must have depended upon his settled purpose to create and sustain them. So his communication of good to his creatures, in all its endless variety, could only be known in consequence of his decrees.

The existence of angels and men—the incarnation of the Son of God—the redemption of sinners by the cross of Christ—the effectual calling, sanctification, and final glorification of all the elect of God—were foreknown, because predetermined. God foreknew the calling of Abraham, the advancement of Joseph, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the exaltation of David to be king, the calling of Isaiah and Jeremiah to be prophets, of Paul to be an apostle, and of the Gentiles to be fellow-heirs and partakers of his promise, because these occurrences were the objects of his eternal purpose. They were events that never would have existed if God had not determined to produce them; and therefore could not have been foreknown if not fore-appointed. In the all-comprehending mind of Jehovah, the appointment and prescience of these things are simultaneous. Antecedent and subsequent are inapplicable to his thoughts. He is in one mind, without variableness. Priority of purpose and knowledge is only ascribed to him to adapt the subject to our weakness.

"Whatever God does in time, that he from all eternity determined to do; yea, and that which is right for God to do in time, he had a right from eternity to determine to do."* All the works of

* Bellamy, on the Wisdom of God in the Permission of Sin, p. 83, note.

God, whether in nature or grace,—whether in judgment or in mercy,—whether executed in time or in eternity,—are no other than expressions of his eternal decrees. God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, both in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. Hence, things that are decreed are known with as much certainty to the divine mind, from eternity, as at the very moment when they come to pass. On this point I entirely concur with my opponents.*

SECTION II.

The Divine Prescience not limited by His Decrees.

Though the foreknowledge of God, with respect to the existence of all positive good, rests solely upon his decrees, yet it does not follow from hence that his prescience is bounded and confined within the limits of his fore-appointments.†

* Either God hath decreed his works from eternity, or else God was ignorant from eternity of what he would do. But God knew what he would do. If God foreknew his works from eternity, he knew them from themselves or from himself. There could be no third thing to acquaint God with them. If his prescience came from the works themselves, it must arise from them as future, or else they were not foreknown, for that is not foreknown at all that is not foreknown whether it will be or not, but being itself under a contingency as to futurition, the greatest judgment that can be made of it is only opinion. If God foreknows the being of a creature from himself, it must be from his decree.

† The Calvinist believes that God elected a people, and decreed they should be holy, and therefore foreknew they would be holy; while the Arminian believes that God, in the order of things, first

If the whole of Jehovah's foreknowledge depends upon his purpose, then he foreknows nothing but what he has determined to effect; or, in other words, what he has determined to foreknow. This would set bounds to the Holy One of Israel, and represent him as making his decrees in the dark, or as being unable to foresee what would transpire among his creatures, any farther than he decreed and interposed. But can we form any conception of an ignorant Deity? Can there be a God of absolute perfection, without omniscience and perfect foresight? Such notions nearly approximate to the opinion of Dr. A. Clarke, which has already been noticed.

The decrees of Jehovah could not exist only by his sovereign choice. If his foreknowledge arises solely and exclusively from his purposes, it must be admitted that he can know just as much or as little as he pleases. He is Lord of his own decrees, and, on this principle, Lord also of his own prescience. The extent of his foresight, like the exercise of his power, would thus depend on the good pleasure of his will. This is confounding things that essentially differ. It is placing predestination and prescience

foresaw who would improve the means and be holy, and then decreed that they should be saved.—(See Fiddes on Predestination.) One will have all the foreknowledge of God to rest upon his decrees, the other will have all the decrees to be founded upon his foreknowledge. Both systems are certainly wrong, and irreconcileable alike with reason and revelation. All good is foreknown, because decreed, and no good can be foreknown which is not decreed, for that would suppose good to exist which God had not produced; or else, that God had produced good without purposing to do so. But his foreknowledge of evil must arise from other sources.

on the same ground, as if both were attributes of the divine nature, or else both of them simply the mere exercise of his will. And as the former can never be classed among his perfections, it being only an act of God, so the latter must not, and cannot, be restricted by the free volitions of his will. It cannot be supposed, for a single moment, that a God of knowledge would have been a God of ignorance, though (if the language be not absurd) he had never decreed to make a single decree. God could have chosen not to exercise his power in the manner he has done, but could he have chosen to be without knowledge respecting any being or event within the compass of his universal dominions? *

Before creative power was exerted, or any decree respecting its exertions formed, if we could conceive of such a period in the existence of the

* "God's knowledge of things possible is founded in the power of God, that he is able to do many things that he never will do, and it is called simple intelligence, because it is the understanding of principles." Ps. lxxviii. 19, 20; Jer. xxxii. 17—27; Matt. iii. 9; Luke iii. 8.—Chauncey on Godliness, p. 23. London. 1700.

Some will have a middle knowledge in God, whereby he knows certain effects that will arise from such and such contingent causes, though the said effects be never absolutely determined of God, but depend upon man's free-will only, and they call it *Scientia Media.*—Ibid.

"God not only knows what will come to pass, but what may possibly come to pass. He not only knew the world he would make before he made it, but all the worlds he could have made. To suppose there was not in the eternal mind a perfect idea of all that would be made before it did exist, is to suppose God to make he knew not what. To suppose God to know no more than what he made, is to render him finite. It is said of God, Psalm cxlvii. 5, '*His understanding is infinite.*' An infinite has no bounds or limits."—Hunt on God's Decrees, pp. 171, 172.

Divine Being, were not all possible systems, in all their endless variety, clearly perceived by the divine mind? Did not Jehovah possess a perfect foreknowledge of what would be the results of any one of all the possible plans, in all its ramifications, from its commencement to its consummation? From all the possibilities before him, he had his election to create or not create. Must he not have known, in the order of things, what would be the result of any one system before he could, in his manifold wisdom, make his election, or form any decrees respecting that on which he fixed. His determinations suppose the existence and exercise of his knowledge. There is no presumption in saying, that the only wise God chose this, not because he was ignorant of the consequences which would arise out of it, nor because he was unable to compare it with any one of the innumerable possible plans which might have been adopted, but because he preferred it to all others. No doubt he had reasons, in his own eternal mind, to justify his choice to himself, whether he has been pleased to reveal or conceal them. That which he has chosen is the best, infinite Wisdom being judge.* It clearly follows, therefore, that God must have an all-com-

* "In the days of eternity, long before the foundation of this world, this system now in existence, and this plan which now takes place, and all other possible systems, and all other possible plans, more in number perhaps than the very sands on the sea shore, all equally lay open to the divine view, and one was as easy to Almightiness as another. He had his choice. He had none to please but himself. Besides him there was no Being. He had a perfectly good taste, and nothing to bias his judgment, and was infinite in wisdom. This he chose, and this of all possible systems the best, infinite Wisdom and perfect Rectitude being judges."—Bellamy, on the Wisdom of God in permission of sin, p. 85.

prehending view of all possible future events, antecedent in the order of nature, to all or any of those decrees which respect his creatures. Let the following questions receive a serious reply :—Before God decreed to create heaven and earth, with all their furniture and inhabitants of angels and men, was he ignorant what the result would be, if such a decree was made and accomplished ? Or did he first decree to give existence to such a world, and then learn from his creatures what events would arise, and make subsequent decrees accordingly ? Or, was he completely ignorant of every possible occurrence till he gave it a decretal existence ? Surely every answer must be in the negative, and, consequently, the point is proved; that the decrees of God do not bound divine foreknowledge.

SECTION III.

Divine Decrees founded upon Divine Foreknowledge.

Some of God's decrees relate particularly to the prevention, to the removal, and to the punishment of sin. How could these decrees ever have been formed, if the intention or existence of sin had not been foreknown ?

Numerous instances might be selected from the holy Scriptures, wherein divine decrees evidently appear as the result of divine foreknowledge. When Abimelech took the wife of Abraham, the Lord, upon a foreknowledge of what would take place if he did not interfere, determined or decreed to interpose. Here we see that foreknowledge was not founded upon the decree, but the decree upon foreknowledge. Knowing the intention of Abime-

lech, the Lord says, "I withheld thee from sinning against me." When Laban pursued Jacob, mischief was in his heart. This was known to the Lord, and how it would be carried into execution if he did not prevent. On this foreknowledge he determined to restrain the wrath that would not praise him. He therefore gave Laban a charge not to speak to Jacob, either good or bad. To the same purpose we might introduce the history of Joseph. View him in the cruel hands of his brethren—in the pit—in Potiphar's house—and in prison. The Lord knew the murderous designs of his brethren, and the wicked intention of his mistress, and he determined to interpose to prevent the sin of murder, and of adultery. Here, then, his decree was founded upon his foreknowledge. God, in these instances, evidently foreknew what was never decreed; as he perfectly foreknows what all creatures will do if not prevented. When David was at Keilah, he inquired of the Lord whether Saul would come down against him, and whether the men of Keilah would deliver him into the hand of Saul. The Lord answered both inquiries in the affirmative. But the event shews that Saul did not go down, and that the men had not the opportunity of delivering David into his hand. How shall we account for this? Was the Lord mistaken? No: he had determined to spare David, and therefore to defeat their purposes. "Many devices are in a man's heart, nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." He knew what would take place unless he interfered, and therefore he knew what was never ordained.*

* "God knew not only how Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah, would act in the circumstances into which they were

Observe how this point is illustrated in the builders of the tower of Babel. The Lord is said to come "down to see the city and the tower which the children of men builded. And the Lord said, Behold the people are one, and they have all one language, and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do." Here is the knowledge and foreknowledge of Jehovah, on which evidently the subsequent decree is founded. "Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." Does not the language here employed evidently teach that the divine determination arose from the divine prescience. The force of the argument will not be injured, whether we consider this decree as formed in time or eternity, or whether the whole is a mere representation accommodated to our weak capacities. The ground of his determination to restrain them was not merely his perfect knowledge of what they had done, but his foreknowledge of what they would have done if they had not been restrained.*

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brought, but how they would have acted had they been favoured with those means which they had not. Was it not possible for God, who knew Jeroboam's heart, to know what he would do when the Israelites had privately persuaded him to return from banishment upon Rehoboam's answer to the petition which it seems he had procured?"—Thorndyke: Of the Covenant of Grace, fol., p. 189. 1659.

"God has an intimate knowledge of the state of our souls; of all the affections, passions, springs, and weights wherewith they are moved; knows infallibly how every possible object that presents itself will determine our judgments and choices, though he himself does not determine them at all."

* God, in his decrees, laid down measures for hindering innumerable sins, which would have happened had it not been for the restraints of his providence and his grace. So that, if his decrees

It appears from these instances in the prevention of sin, that divine foreknowledge was not founded upon God's decrees, but his decrees upon his foreknowledge.

The decrees of God which relate to the removal of sin from his people, presuppose a knowledge of their sin. Jesus was set up and engaged to be a surety for the chosen of the Lord from everlasting. He was "verily foreordained" to be a sacrifice for sin, and accordingly was appointed to be slain, and was slain in the divine purpose from the foundation of the world.* But there can be no ground of suffering excepting sin; and even sin, if not foreknown, could not have been a necessary ground for the appointment of a sacrifice. Hence the iniquities of the people were clearly perceived by the prescience of Jehovah, and they were laid upon Christ; and he was, upon that ground, delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God to be crucified and slain. Thus the foreknowledge of sin lies at the bottom of that decree which appointed Jesus to an ignominious and an accursed death.†

should be regarded on this subject at all, we should consider that his decrees, as executed by his providence, are not the cause of sin, but the cause why there is not vastly more wickedness in the world than there is, and why the wickedness that is in the world is so much restrained and kept within such bounds, and overruled for such good ends.—(See M'Laurin's Sermon, "The sins of men not chargeable on God.") But on the supposition that God's knowledge is bounded by his decree, he could have no knowledge of those infinite possibilities which might have happened upon the introduction of any other plan.

* 1 Peter, i. 19, 20; Rev. xiii. 8.

† "Though we discard the unfounded notion of Adam's apostacy being decreed, and the self-contradicting notion of a divine 'decree to permit' it; it was foreseen in its adequate cause, and the divine

This view of the subject cannot easily be overturned. Surely none will say that God could not foreknow the existence of sin unless he gave it being by his own absolute decree; and that he, therefore, decreed all the sins of all his people, and then decreed that Christ should bear them in his own body on the tree. This would leave, I think, the origin, existence, and effects of sin, with Him who is of purer eyes than to behold evil.

The decree to pardon sin, and subdue its influence in the hearts and lives of those who are finally saved, must suppose the existence of guilt, and the prevalence of depravity, and involve Jehovah's foreknowledge of them. The same might be affirmed in reference to every deliverance that is wrought in and for the salvation of sinners. Prescience, therefore, in these cases, is not the fruit, but the basis of predestination.

plan proceeds on that foreknowledge."—(Dr. Williams's Essay, p. 148, 3rd edit.)

"If the event (man's apostacy) was *uncertain*, where would be the wisdom or the need of a redeeming plan prior to the event? And if the agent was free from compulsion and restraint—especially if made upright, or created in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness—how was his fall so infallibly *certain* as to afford a sufficient ground for the antecedent appointment of a plan of redemption, the ultimate end of which must have been fixed prior to the means of its accomplishment? Is it conceivable, that certainty can be founded on uncertainty? Here, then, is a divine *prescience* without a divine *causation* of the event; the former (prescience) is necessary for the *formation* of a system of ends and means which is accomplished by a progressive series of events; the latter (causation or appointment) can no more take place than infinite holiness can oppose itself. In short, if the fall and crimes of men were not foreseen as *certain*, there could have been no ultimate end, such as we have proved to exist, or means adopted to attain it. If sovereignty be supposed to appoint, or any way to *cause*, the introduc-

As the decree to remove sin by the cross of Immanuel, and to pardon it for his sake, proceeds upon the principle of sin being foreknown, so the decree to punish sinners rests upon the same foundation. To punish where no sin exists, or, which is the same thing, where it is not known or foreknown to exist, is ridiculous, if not absurd. The idea of punishment from God, without the consideration of crime or guilt, or blame-worthiness, surely cannot be entertained for a moment. He never inflicts punishment undeserved, nor more than is a meet recompense. The misery of his creatures never flows from his absolute sovereignty. If he has appointed the wicked to wrath and to condemnation, it is upon the foreknowledge of their crimes.

Was not God's decree to overthrow Pharaoh and

tion of sin or the criminality of actions, rectitude would be no rectitude, and sin would be no sin."—(Williams's Essay, p. 282.)

It would be very inconsistent in those who maintain that the decree of election supposes the objects of it to be viewed as fallen and sinful, to assert also that divine decrees are the ground of divine foreknowledge. This would make the sin of the creature the object of God's appointment; and so, as a certain writer says, "God would be the impulsive and moving cause of sin. Neither could man justly be punished for that sin to which he is either precisely appointed or compelled by the will of God."—(Peter Moulin.)

Though the decrees of God are certain, and exist at once, yet, in conformity to our weakness, they may be represented as succeeding one another, as the decree to overthrow the world by water first, and afterwards by fire, must, in order, be considered as subsequent to the decree to create the world.

"If God had not certainly foreknown Adam's sin, he would not have set up his Son from everlasting as Mediator to redeem him or any of his posterity; seeing, then, that that early contrivance of infinite wisdom might have been useless."—(Hunt, on God's Decrees, p. 170.)

his host in the Red Sea founded upon a knowledge of their sins? The same remark will apply to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Sin was the ground of the decree to destroy. As men are prone to attribute their sin, and consequently their misery, to the divine decrees, God, in condescension to our weakness, represents himself as coming to "see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it which is come unto me, and if not, I will know."* In this, as in the case of Babel, knowledge precedes the decree to punish. And must it not be the same in all other cases, unless it be affirmed that Jehovah punishes without fault? God will consign to eternal misery the finally impenitent and unbelieving; but his determination to do so rests upon his foreknowledge of their sin.†

These hints prove that, in many instances, the

* Gen. xviii. 20, 21.

† "Hence, those who contend that the liberty of actions is subject to an absolute decree, erroneously conclude that the decree of God is the cause of his foreknowledge, and antecedent in order of time. If we must apply to God a phraseology borrowed from our own habits and understanding, that his decrees should have been the consequence of his foreknowledge seems more agreeable to reason, as well as to scripture, and to the nature of God himself, who, as we have just proved, decreed every thing according to his infinite wisdom, by virtue of his foreknowledge."—(Milton: Christian Doctrine, p. 40.)

A long quotation might be made from p. 41 to 43, on the certainty of God's foreknowledge in connexion with man's freedom.

"It has been the practice of the schools to use the word *predestination*, not only in the sense of election, but also in that of reprobation. This, however, is not consistent with the caution necessary on so momentous a subject; since wherever it is mentioned in scripture, election alone is uniformly intended. Rom. viii. 29, 30; 1 Cor. ii. 7; Eph. i. 5, 11; Acts ii. 23, iv. 28."—(Ibid. p. 44.)

decrees of the Most High are founded in his foreknowledge of events, and that his foreknowledge is founded upon his decrees only so far as respects the sovereign and positive communication of good. To affirm that God cannot know what will come to pass unless he has rendered it certain by his own absolute appointment, is not far from ascribing ignorance to the Fountain of Wisdom, and sin to Him who is glorious in holiness. On this principle he could not foreknow that sin would ever exist till he had made it certain by his own unchanging decree. This would imply an imperfection of knowledge; and if he made sin certain by a divine appointment, then would he be considered as the author of that which his righteous soul hateth.* Calm reflection leads to the conclusion that many of the divine de-

* Many persons seem to think that all future necessary actions are foreknown because infallibly decreed, and because that some things are foreknown upon that ground, conclude, therefore, that nothing can be foreknown on any other. This leads them to the decretal appointment of all the evil in the universe, which the hyper-Calvinist will assert; and the Arminian, not knowing how to distinguish, rejects the fore-appointments of God altogether. The truth is, that every future event is evidently certain and foreknown to the Divine Mind; *some*, because they are foreordained; and *others*, from the tendency of the *nature* of things. There are many things, and many events, respecting which there is no necessity for any decree, and which a decree could not have made otherwise. That a creature should not be independent and infinite,—that a relation should subsist between the Creator and the creature,—that angels and men should be dependent, mutable, peccable, and finite—are points that cannot rest upon any decree of God. A decree could not alter them. Decrees, therefore, are not the source or ground of God's universal foreknowledge having respect only to his own works and operations.—(See Edwards's Works, vol. i. p. 241.)

crees have taken their rise from the all-comprehending foreknowledge of the Most High.

SECTION IV.

The Prescience of God with respect to Moral Evil arises from the absolute, infinite, and unsearchable perfection of the Divine Nature, and not from a Divine Decree.

THE foreknowledge of God, respecting the free volitions and actions of his creatures, especially as to the origin and progress of moral evil, arises from the absolute and infinite perfection of his nature. If his own creative power is exerted, he must of necessity know what his creatures will be and do with the faculties with which they are endued. If a wise mechanic can fortel, in some degree, what the instrument he has constructed will, in given circumstances, perform, shall not the only wise God be able to look through all his works, and foresee, with absolute certainty, what will be the result? He knows perfectly well what beasts, birds, and fishes, by mere instinct, will do in any given circumstance. The same may be affirmed respecting both men and angels. He is so intimately acquainted with the essential properties of all creatures, that all their future volitions and motions are clearly foreseen. Whatever powers or passions, strength or weakness, angels and men, in their pure or fallen state, may possess, they are all known to Jehovah. He knows how every man and angel will act, as certainly as if volition and action had been most absolutely decreed. Hence the sins of all his creatures, that ever

have been or ever will be, lie naked to his eye, without his rendering those sins certain by any infallible appointment of his own. The opinion of Dr. Watts upon any subject, generally speaking, is deserving of attention. Let us hear him on the point in hand: "Now the great God, among his unsearchable powers and perfections, has a knowledge of the agency of free causes, as we have of necessary causes. And as he has a full view of all concomitant circumstances, he hath a way to foresee events in their contingent causes; such as the free will of man is, as well as we have a way, by reason, to foresee many things in their necessary causes. It is certain he does foreknow the future contingent actions of men, even their wicked actions, because he has foretold a multitude of them in the Bible; and it is granted that, from his foreknowledge of any future event, we may infer the consequential certainty of it, because his foreknowledge cannot be deceived; yet this does not at all prove his antecedent determination of it by any decree, nor his influence upon it. Neither can we infer, from God's mere foreknowledge, that there is any natural necessity of the event, since the causes are but contingent, such as man's free will. The distinction between the certainty of a future event, with the consequent necessity of it, derived from God's foreknowledge, and the antecedent necessity derived from the nature of things, or from God's actual predetermination of it, sufficiently solves this difficulty. The first may be where the second is not."*

Some persons are ready to ask, *how* can these

* Watts's Works, vol. iii. p. 480. Leeds edit.

things be? So, when regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and the resurrection of the dead by the power of God, are stated as revealed truths, men of reputed wisdom may express their doubts respecting them. But why should these things be thought incredible? Why? Because men reduce God to their own level. They think it impossible for him to know and do that which they cannot perfectly comprehend. This is the fruitful source of many erroneous opinions in matters of religion, and the parent or the nurse of infidelity. Because we cannot know how any of our fellow-men, nor even how we ourselves should act in many given cases, we are ready to conclude that Jehovah cannot. It would be well for finite beings ever to remember that many things may be impossible to men that are not so to Jehovah. "With God all things are possible."

The natures, volitions, and actions of all creatures, are necessarily limited and finite. They are bounded by means and circumstances arising from their relation and connexions with other creatures. There are causes and results by which they are affected. The infinite mind of Jehovah must surely comprehend every thing finite, and therefore the free volitions of angels and men must come within his immediate cognizance. For if Jehovah know any one act or volition of a created mind, he knows the cause of that, and of the forerunner of that cause; as also the effect of that act or volition, and so on through the whole series, from the first to the last. To suppose the contrary, would set limits to his infinity, and throw confusion over his whole empire.

To an infinite intelligence, all things, in their remotest springs, are clear and transparent. It would be perfectly easy for the all-comprehending mind

of Deity to look through ten thousand ages, yea, through ten thousand worlds, and see the end from the beginning, and minutely discern every future volition, speech and action of all the myriads of his accountable creatures. If it be said that every effect must have a cause, and that the cause must be ascertained in order to know with certainty the effect, it will be replied, that God is intimately acquainted with the cause of all the volitions and actions of all his free creatures.* The cause of moral evil, which is involved in so much darkness and mystery to us, is neither clouded nor concealed before the Divine Mind. He foresaw that cause, whatever it is, before he created the world.

* "I believe that all causes are so immediately chained to their effects as, if a perfect knowing nature get hold of but one link, it will drive the entire *series* or pedigree of the whole to its utmost end, so that, in truth, there is no fortuitiveness or contingency of things in respect of themselves, but only in respect of us that are ignorant of their certain and necessary causes."†

I repeat, that some things are foreknown and necessary, because decreed; such as the creation and government of the world, and the redemption and salvation of the church; and other things, including all imperfection and moral evil, are capable of being foreknown from connexion and consequence.‡

"God warned Joseph to depart into Egypt, 'because,' said he, '*Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.*' He knew what he would do before he did it, and so it came to pass. Yea, God foresaw the evil act, though coloured over with specious pretences to worship Christ."§ So Peter's denial of Christ was foreknown, and even foretold, as it came to pass. God foreknows our thoughts, not only what we do think, but what we shall think, long before they enter into our minds.‖

† Sir Kenelm Digby's Observations on Sir Thomas Brown's Religio Medici. 1669.
‡ See Edwards's Works, vol. i. p. 242.
§ Hunt on God's Decrees, p. 170. ‖ Idem. p. 171.

God formed man in his own likeness, upright and free from any stain of impurity, able to obey his Maker, and continue happy, but liable to fall and become miserable. Yet he knew he would fall, though the cause of his fall could not be in God. Some have called the cause of Adam's sin by the name of *passive power*, words not easily understood; some have attributed it to the *withdrawment* of that influence or strength which was requisite to his continuance in a state of innocence; and others have ascribed it to the *decree* and fore-appointment of God. Whatever we may say of the first of these opinions, the other two must be discarded, or else we attribute the cause of man's sin and ruin to his Creator.* If God withdrew from his creature, angel or man, any influence or strength which the creature naturally had, and which was necessary to his yielding obedience to his Maker's command, such withdrawment would render his obedience impossible, and his sin inevitable, independent of himself, and of his own choice; and thus, in fact, the cause of the creature's sin and ruin would be charged upon

* "Were the proper nature of sin, or the sinfulness of an act, adequately considered, we should never hear of the absurdity, the blasphemous impiety, of GOD being the *author of sin* by a reprobating decree." "Moral evil, or the sinfulness of a moral act, cannot be an object of any divine decree, for it is absurd to suppose that God has decreed anything which he would not or could not, consistently with his nature, effect; and yet, as a shadow is known by the substance to which it refers, so may moral evil be known to infinite intelligence, in every possible case, by the good to which it is opposed; and the foreknowledge of this ground of defectibility, in all possible circumstances, may give occasion to positive acts, divine decrees, and operations."—(Dr. Williams's Essay, 3rd edit. pp. 71, 75.)

Jehovah. It may be said, "God could have prevented the introduction of moral evil; and as he did not, it seems he approved of it, and that it was according to his will." On this principle, we might argue that all the sins that have ever been committed have been approved by Jehovah, and have therefore been according to his will. But neither reason nor revelation will warrant such a conclusion. Even men of influence and power do not approve of all that which they could, but do not, hinder; and there are many things said and done in their families which are not according to their will. And shall it be thought that God cannot create a free, rational, accountable creature, endued with every qualification requisite to holiness and happiness, and then suffer him to choose freely for himself, and even permit him to fall, unless at the same time he had decreed or approved of his conduct? Let no man say, in any form, directly or indirectly, that he is tempted of God, or that God is in any sense the cause of moral evil. Mutability or peccability is common to all creatures. It is not possible for God to impart essential immutability, unchangeableness, and impeccability, to a creature. Such perfection is incommunicable. If created natures are mutable, however holy, they must be liable to fall, if not *supernaturally* upheld. And, indeed, without this quality of mutability, this imperfection or perfection, call it as we please, man had not been an accountable, responsible agent.* If he could not sin, he had not been in a state of probation. Commands

* "To be free from *defectibility,* or a *liableness* to choose amiss, is an incommunicable perfection of Deity." "When it is said that man has 'a defectibility of nature,' it is intended to express this primary and eternal truth—that a created nature, however

and threatenings are alike unnecessary to those who *cannot obey*, and to those who *cannot disobey*. Had it been possible to have created man impeccable, and had God done so, then this world had not been what it is, but altogether a different system, of which we can form no adequate conception. True, God could have confirmed Adam in a state of unchanging purity, as he has done the elect angels; but even in that case our world would have been, in every respect, different to what it now is. There would have been no sin, no Saviour, no gospel, no afflictions, no persecutions, no sickness, no death. Those persons who are determined, in one way or other, to lay sin upon God, either by saying that he decreed it, or that he could have prevented it and did not, which they make equivalent to the divine appointment, frequently ask, Why did he not prevent Adam's apostacy? They might, with equal propriety, ask, Why did he create Adam or this world at all? Why did he not create a very different system of things? To such, the language of the apostle is very applicable: "Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?"*

perfect, is *defectible.* Indefectibility, every reflecting, unprejudiced mind must admit, is an incommunicable attribute of Deity, no less than infinity, independence, all-sufficiency, and immutability. Defectibility, therefore, is an essential property of every nature but the divine. To deny this is to identify Creator and creature, and to contradict the plainest facts—the facts of actual defection and crimes."—(Dr. Williams's Essay, 3rd edit., pp. 65, 69.)

* "Moreover, all things whatsoever being originally adjusted, ordered, and disposed by the infinitely wise and profound thought of the Supreme Being, and being afterwards brought forth in time, in their various orders and seasons, under his *direction* or *permission*,

Satisfactorily to account for the existence of moral evil has always been deemed a great difficulty. Some have supposed two supreme beings, the one good, the other evil. But this is nearly a contradiction in terms, and absolutely impossible in fact. There certainly is an eternal and immutable order and fitness in certain things, independent of positive or revealed law. Evil is a deviation from this order or reason. Man could not be immutable as a creature. He must have liberty of choice. This may be called perfection or imperfection. He must be able to act or not act, choose or refuse, in order to accountability. This finiteness, or defectibility of a created nature, seems to make sin possible, and the adoption of a wrong choice gave it

according to, and in pursuance of, his own most divine and perfect scheme, we are neither, on one side, to reckon any event to be a *pure accident* or *contingency*, nor, on the other, to derive it from *blind, mechanical necessity*, or inexorable FATE, in the vulgar sense."*

"The whole nature of sin consisting only in a defect, no other cause need be assigned of it than a defective one, that is, an understanding, will, and inferior powers, however originally good, yet mutably and defectively so. I shall not insist to prove that sin is no positive being; but I take the argument to be irrefragable (notwithstanding the cavils made against it) that is drawn from that common maxim, that all positive existence is either first, or from the first. And that of Dionysius the Areopagite is an ingenious one: he argues that no being can be evil *per se*, for then it must be immutably so, which no evil can be, for, to be always the same, is a certain property of goodness; it is so even of the highest goodness. And hence, sin being supposed only a defect, a soul that is only defectively holy might well enough be the cause of it—that is, the deficient cause."†

* Ditton, on the Resurrection of Christ; Appendix, sect. xiv. p. 556.

† Man's Creation in a Holy but Mutable State; a Sermon, by the Rev. John Howe, M.A. See his Works, vol. ii. p. 379. 1822.—See also Reprobation Disproved, pp. 97, 100. 2nd edit. Wightman.

existence.* By moral evil or sin, I intend some failure in a moral agent, with respect to that disposition or conduct required from him by the law or will of God. The relation subsisting between him and his Maker, and between him and his fellow-creatures, lays man under obligations to conduct himself towards both with propriety ; and a *want* of this propriety I call moral evil or sin. This, then, being a negative, may be produced by a negative cause ; and therefore there is no necessity to suppose any positive act or decree of God to give it existence.†

Let existence be given to an intelligent being, man or angel,—let that being be constituted a moral agent, capable of serving and enjoying God, possessed of intellect, and will, and freedom of choice, and presented with objects adapted to his wants, which are essential to his accountability, and we may perceive an adequate negative cause of defect, or moral evil. It is peculiar to Jehovah to be naturally, absolutely, and unchangeably perfect. The highest perfection of a created nature is not stamped with immutability. It is God's exclusive prerogative to be unchangeable. "I am the Lord, I change not." The limited finite nature of the highest intelligent creatures must be liable to change. This is the essential difference between Jehovah and his creatures. Hence the possibility of sin or defect. If sin had been impossible, there had been no ground for accountability ;

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* See Ditton, on the Resurrection, Appendix, p. 559, &c.

† "It is called actual sin, not that sin is properly an action, for in reality it implies defect. Every act is in itself good; it is only its irregularity or deviation from the line of right which, properly speaking, is evil."—(Milton Christian Doctrine, pp. 269, 270.)

but there is no necessity to implicate either the influence or the decree of God in its production.

However difficult it may be to account satisfactorily for the origin of moral evil, we all know that sin is in the world; that God foreknew it would be; and that, had it been his pleasure, he could have prevented its existence. But these particulars do not involve the conclusion that sin is the object of a divine decree.

It has been thus proved that divine foreknowledge, in some instances, is founded upon divine decrees, but not limited by them;—that, in many cases, the determinations of the Divine Mind arise from divine prescience;—and that the foreknowledge of God, especially respecting moral evil, arises from the absolute perfection of the divine nature. The notion, therefore, that the decrees and foreknowledge of God are of the same extent, and of God's prescience being exclusively founded upon his purpose, is entirely overthrown. It is evident to a demonstration that God foreknew many things which he never decreed. To conclude otherwise, is to set limits to the Holy One of Israel, and to ask, with the scoffer or the atheist, "How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High? Can he judge through the dark cloud?" Convinced that the Lord, though he has neither caused nor decreed our sin, yet that he has a perfect foresight of it, and that it is naked and bare before him, let us humble ourselves and seek deliverance from our iniquity in the way he has been graciously pleased to reveal. What abundant cause we have to bless the Lord, that, in his infinite wisdom and love, he has contrived and made known a plan whereby, consistent with all the perfections of his nature, guilty mortals may be delivered from the wrath to come.

CHAPTER VI.

A SECOND ARGUMENT IN FAVOUR OF THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE DIVINE DECREES, EXAMINED AND REFUTED.

COMPELLED to acknowledge that the prescience and predestination of God are not, in point of extent, identified, and that the former is not exclusively founded upon the latter, the advocate of universal decrees changes his mode of defence. "The foreknowledge of God," says he, "is confessedly universal, absolute, and infallible; every future event *must* therefore inevitably take place with the same absolute certainty as if it had been decreed, or the prescience of Jehovah would be liable to disappointment; and this absolute universality and certainty of divine foreknowledge involves the same consequences as the universality of the divine decrees, and is equally opposed to the doctrine of contingence."

The former part of this argument appears to me irrelevant. I do not plead for any limitation to divine foreknowledge, only to Jehovah's decrees. But allowing both the language and the sentiment, how does it affect the question? I prefer the word *will* instead of *must*, where divine causation in the production of the event is not implied. However, it makes no difference as to the absolute certainty of the event, though it affects the *kind* of necessity attaching to it. God's foreknowledge is neither limited nor doubtful. All events that ever did, or ever will happen, were perfectly foreseen. Jehovah

has never been mistaken with respect to time, place, motive, circumstance, or consequence of any thing, whether volition, word, or action, which has ever transpired. On this point there can be no controversy; but *whether absolute foreknowledge involves the same consequences, and is equally opposed to contingency, as does the universality of divine decrees*, may afford matter for serious discussion.

Let it be remembered, however, that a pressing difficulty in the way of harmonizing our views of truth, is not a sufficient reason why our statements should be rejected. The difficulty of reconciling the prescience of God with the liberty of man and the contingency of human actions, presses equally upon all who maintain the universality and absolute certainty of divine foreknowledge; and those who deny that foreknowledge, to free themselves from the difficulty, do, in that case, approach the borders of atheism, and are not far from uniting with him who said in his heart, "There is no God."

In stating the doctrines of divine prescience, and of the contingence of human volitions and actions, there is need of great caution on either hand, lest we resign the world, with all its inhabitants and events, into the hands either of mere chance, or of blind fate. The former takes the reins of government from God, the latter robs man of his freedom and liberty. The one reduces every thing to a state of confusion and uncertainty, the other represents the world and its tenants as one great machine, moving and acting as it is moved and acted upon by the Supreme Ruler of the universe. The former gives God no glory; the latter charges him with all the sins and miseries of his creatures.

SECTION I.

On Foreknowledge and Contingency.

THE decrees of God are sure to be accomplished. There is nothing of a doubtful nature connected with them. They are as entirely unchangeable and immutable as their author. "The counsel of the Lord standeth fast for ever, and the thoughts of his heart from generation to generation." Nothing unforeseen can possibly occur to prevent the accomplishment of divine purposes.*

By the certainty of divine foreknowledge I mean that Jehovah, who sees the end from the beginning, cannot be deceived or disappointed. No event will happen contrary to his expectation; nay, every thing will happen, in all its parts and circumstances, in perfect accordance with his foreknowledge.†

Contingent events are such as appear to us fortuitous, casual, or accidental. Contingence stands opposed, not to certainty, but to a certain kind of necessity. We read that "Ruth went out to glean, and her HAP was to light on the field of Boaz." This is what we call chance, because she might have happened to light upon some other field. It appeared fortuitous and accidental.

"We are in all cases to acknowledge and have an eye to the divine counsels and disposals, within the verge of which all kinds of events are comprehended, how casual and fortuitous, or how necessary and inevitable soever they may seem to us to be."‡

* See chap. ii. † See chap. iii.

‡ Ditton on the Resurrection of Christ; Appendix, p. 556. London, 1712.

" It was no way inconsistent with, or derogating from, any one perfection of an Infinite Being to endow other beings which he had made with such a power as what we call liberty: that is, to furnish them with such capacities, dispositions, and principles of action, that it should be possible for them either to observe or to deviate from those eternal rules and measures of fitness and agreeableness, with respect to certain things and circumstances, which were so conformable to the infinite rectitude of his own will, and which infinite, all-comprehending reason and penetration must necessarily see and discover in the profundity of its own essence. Now *evil* is a deviation from those measures of unerring eternal order and reason. Now for the bringing this about there is no more necessary than the exerting certain acts of that *power* which we call by the name of liberty or freewill. By this we are enabled to choose or to refuse, and can determine ourselves to action and practise accordingly. And when our choice is made one way we do what is *good;* when the contrary, we do *evil.*" *

Contingence, then, is a relative idea, so that the same event or circumstance may be matter of certainty to one, and of contingence to another. Hence nothing can be truly or really contingent to God. His understanding is infinite, and he sees every thing with absolute certainty. Events can be contingent only to those who are not previously acquainted with their certain and infallible causes. According to this explanation I would be understood when I employ the word or its derivatives. By free agency, I understand that power whereby

* Ibid. p. 561.

a person feels himself at liberty to choose one of two things set before him: a freedom from force, control, restraint, or constraint out of himself. The doctrine of motives is not denied, for man cannot act without motive. Motive must not be confounded with force or compulsion, or any thing that destroys the idea of self-determination.

The question now returns, How are these things to be reconciled? If no event ever takes place without the fore-appointment or the certain foreknowledge of Jehovah, are not our notions of free agency, human liberty, and contingence overthrown and destroyed?

Whatever difficulty, apparent or real, we may find in reconciling these things, the facts are too numerous and distinct to be denied: That nothing takes place unforeseen to the Almighty, we are bound to acknowledge; and an appeal to our own experience is sufficient to convince us that we act freely and voluntarily, without force and compulsion. In ten thousand instances events appear to us mere matters of contingence; events that might or might not have taken place. All the actions of free creatures, considered as free, must necessarily be contingent to man, and yet absolutely certain in the sight of God. To the Most High nothing is casual or contingent—nothing can come to pass contrary to his expectation, or in any way different to what he foresaw. Before the lot is cast into the lap he knows the result.* And surely it cannot be

* In prospect, we say of a friend, it is possible he may or may not come, or move, or speak, because we have no certain rule or data by which we can know beforehand what will take place. The events of to-morrow are all contingent to us, because we know not what a day may bring forth.

more difficult to reconcile the certain prescience and foreknowledge of God with the liberty of man and the contingency of human actions, than it would be to reconcile the fore-appointment of all events with the ideas of free-agency and of contingency. We act freely and voluntarily of our own accord, and yet to us things in general are purely contingent. The case of Ruth, already mentioned, appears to justify the conclusion. "Her HAP was to light on a part of the field belonging to Boaz." This circumstance, big with events of the greatest importance, not only to her and to Naomi, but to the whole church of God, to the latest period of time, was to her entirely contingent; but to the Lord it was absolute certainty. It was a link in that chain which reaches from the counsels of eternity to the consummation of all things, both ends of which are in the hands of God. It was to Kish, the father of Saul, a mere chance that his asses were lost. So it was to Saul and his servant, that in seeking them they should be brought near to the prophet, and introduced to him at a very particular juncture. Chance on their part was certainty with God. It appeared accidental that the Midianitish soldier was telling his dream when Gideon, within hearing, was surveying the camp, yet it was ordered of the Lord to accomplish his own designs. When the man lay wounded in the way between Jerusalem and Jericho, it was by chance that a certain priest came down that way. It was a mere casualty to man, but not unexpected to Jehovah. The woman of Samaria went to Jacob's well to draw water, at the very juncture when Jesus was there: she might have gone sooner or later. The thing was altogether contingent. But she happened, or it was

her *hap*, without any foresight or design of hers, to go just at that moment. But the event was previously known to Jesus, who "must needs go through Samaria," to give her the meeting. The Philistines tried an experiment, to know whether their affliction came from the hand of God, or "it was a chance that happened to them." The young man who brought David tidings of the death of Saul, said, "As I *happened* by *chance* upon Mount Gilboa, behold Saul leaned upon his spear." In the dispute between the men of Israel and Judah, respecting David's return to Jerusalem, after the death of Absalom, "there happened to be there a man of Belial," whom the men of Israel followed, even "Sheba, the son of Bichri." The word happen, and its derivatives, in the sacred Scriptures, generally refer us to events which were to men matters of contingence. Thus "time and chance happeneth to them all." "As it happeneth to the fool," saith Solomon, "so it happeneth unto me." Common language perfectly coincides with that used in the Bible, respecting the contingency of events.

Many events respecting ourselves happen from day to day, which are to us strictly contingencies, and yet matters of absolute certainty to the Lord. This we cannot deny without plunging ourselves into inextricable difficulties and monstrous absurdities. The freedom of man, and the prescience of God, involve both the contingency and the certainty of events. If any event, sinful or holy, be unknown to God, he might be liable to disappointment, and have occasion to change his mind and alter his plans, and thus the immutability of his nature, volitions, and purposes would be overthrown. All contingencies are perfectly within the divine comprehen-

sion, or the knowledge of God would be augmented in proportion as the volitions and actions of free agents are developed.*

It may still be asked, "Are not mutability and uncertainty involved in the very nature of creatures? What ground of certainty, therefore, can be derived from them? Do not chance and contingency attend all their movements, and pervade all their actions?" I readily admit these points. But then we are asked, "How can these contingent events be known to God, if not rendered certain by his unchanging decrees? Can there be any ground of certain foreknowledge, but that of fore-appointment?" These and similar questions have been already answered.† Is not Jehovah the only wise God, and perfect in knowledge? He would have known what every creature of his would do, had he never formed a single decree respecting their actions. The natures which he has created present to his infinite mind a series of causes and effects, which, if he controls not, will inevitably take

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* "If from all eternity God foreknew that such a thing would be, then the event was infallibly certain beforehand, and that proposition was true from all eternity that such a thing would be, and therefore there was an indissoluble connexion beforehand between the subject and the predicate of that proposition."

"For God certainly to know that a thing will be, that possibly may be, and possibly may not be, implies a contradiction. If possibly it may be otherwise (than as he sees it), then how can he know certainly that it will be (as he sees it)? Its possibility of being otherwise is inconsistent with certain foreknowledge that it will not be otherwise. Then God may be mistaken, and a thing be otherwise than he sees or judges it to be."—(See President Edwards's Works, vol. viii. p. 403. Leeds ed.)

† See chap. v.

place.* If God give existence to man or angel, does he not know what will be the first, the second, and third volitions and actions of that being, and so on for ever? He knows, without fore-ordination, what influence one being and event will have upon another, throughout the whole series, till time shall be no more. This appears plain from his foretelling what would have transpired if he had not interposed in the case of Abimelech. He knew what the men of Keilah intended against David, and what would have been the fate of Jerusalem if he had not cut off the Assyrian army. The Redeemer could say what Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah, would have done, had they been placed in other circumstances. The Lord sees what crimes some persons would commit, had they an opportunity, and how some saints would fall, or how they would honour him, if placed in peculiar circumstances. If he knows what would occur if

* God knows all things, 1 Sam. ii. 3; Job xxxvi. 4, xlii. 2; Psalm cxvii. 5; Jer. xxxii. 19; Acts xv. 18; and that future contingencies are not excepted from this general assertion, appears from his having foretold some of the most contingent events, as well as from the following passages:—Isa. xlii. 9, xlviii. 3, xliii. 10, xli. 22—26; Psalm cxxxix. 2; Doddridge's Lectures, Lec. 154.

Every future event has an absolute ground of certainty in the divine mind, whether that event relate to moral good or evil. The ground upon which all future moral evil is foreseen, is not any divine decree, but the infinite undeceivable prescience of God, whereby he perfectly ascertains how every created being will think and act without his special interposition. When man chooses and acts aright, it is from a decretive overruling cause from divine influence; when wrong, it proceeds voluntarily from the creature himself, without foreign influence, of which Jehovah has a perfect foresight.—See Dr. Williams's Essay.

he did not prevent it, he must surely know those things that do really occur, though they are not the objects of his decree. Had there been no decrees, this world had been very different; but even then the Lord would have had a perfect knowledge of every real, yea, and of every possible future event. There could not be any necessity for a decree to render that certain which God infallibly knew would certainly take place without a decree. Jehovah, foreseeing things and events which he has not decreed, does decree when and where he will interpose and prevent, and how he will control and overrule them for his own glory. Thus a learned divine says, "God did order or direct the avarice of Judas, the malice of the high priests, the popularity of Herod, and the ambition of Pilate for the accomplishment of that which he had foredetermined concerning Christ. In thus speaking and thinking, we retain the form of wholesome doctrine; we think and speak as the Spirit teacheth us. But if any shall say or think that God did ordain either Judas to be covetous, or the high priests to be malicious, or Herod or Pilate to be popular and ambitious, to this end and purpose, that they might respectively be the betrayers and murderers of the Son of God, this is dangerous. God did dispose or order Adam's fall (for by his all-seeing providence, and all-ruling power, he turned his fall into his own glory and our greater good), but he did not decree, ordain, or order that Adam should fall, or commit that transgression by which he fell. For so he should have been the author both of Adam's first sin, and of all the sins which are necessarily derived to us from him. For no man, I think, will deny that God is the sole author of all

his own ordinances and decrees, or of whatsoever he hath fore-decreed or fore-determined us for to do."*

Every good must have an efficient cause; that efficient cause is no other but God himself, and he must know from eternity what he will effect in time; therefore he must foreknow, with infinite exactness, all the good that will ever be within the bounds of his creation. Jehovah foreknows all evil, because it is relative, and is the absence or contrariety of good, and must therefore be known as standing related to the contrary good. It clearly follows, therefore, that prescience and pre-ordination, foreknowledge and fore-appointment, are not identified.†

This conclusion is supported by the celebrated author of *Paradise Lost.* "We must hold," says he, "that God foreknows all future events, but that he has not decreed them all absolutely, lest all sin should be imputed to the Deity, and evil spirits and wicked men should be exempted from blame. I allow that future events which God has foreseen will happen certainly, but not of necessity. They will happen certainly, because the divine prescience cannot be deceived; but they will not happen necessarily, because prescience can have no influence on the object foreknown, inasmuch as it is only an intransitive action. What, therefore, is to happen,

* Dr. Jacks, as quoted by Butterworth, on Moral Government, p. 206.—See also Milton, Christian Doctrine, p. 30, &c., where he proves that many events take place which God did not decree.

† From God's own hand descend our woes and joys;
These he decrees, and he but suffers those:
All power is his, and whatsoe'er he wills
The will, itself omnipotent, fulfils.—*Pope's Odyssey.*

according to contingency and the free will of man, is not the effect of God's prescience, but is produced by the free agency of its own natural causes, the future spontaneous inclination of which is perfectly known to God. As God foreknew that Adam would fall of his own free will, his fall was certain, but not necessary, since it proceeded from his own free will, which is incompatible with necessity."*

SECTION II.

The same subject continued.

MR. GILBERT, in his dispute with Dr. South, was partially right in asserting, that the predestination of the Calvinists did necessarily follow upon the prescience of the Arminians. This does not at all clash with the sentiment contended for in these pages. But to conclude that God cannot, and does not, foreknow any thing but because he had peremptorily predetermined it, is most injuriously to limit

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* Milton's Treatise on Christian Doctrine, pp. 41, 42.

Dr. Hammond has many very judicious remarks on the prescience and decrees of God. He allows that God predetermines the acts of his own will, but that he does not predetermine those volitions of the human mind which are evil. The difference between these two is as much as between my *willing* to do a lawful thing myself, and my *willing* another to do an unlawful thing. He admits that God may decree to dispose, order, and overrule all things according to his will; that he decrees all his own acts; and that he perfectly, and with the greatest certainty, foresees every thing that takes place in the world, but that his foresight has no manner of causal influence upon things to produce their existence.—(See Dr. Hammond's Works, 1 vol. folio, p. 486. London, 1684.)

and restrain the knowledge or prescience of the Deity. It magnifies his power and purpose, by depressing and debasing his wisdom and understanding. It represents his knowledge, not as an essential, primary perfection of his nature, but as a result flowing from the exercise of his will. Though the certainty of divine foreknowledge could not be reconciled with the contingency of human actions, are we prepared to deny either? Shall we bind up all persons, things, volitions, and actions, in dire fatality, and father fate upon the irreversible decrees of Jehovah? "Who would ever imagine," says a certain author, "that professed Christians would charge that upon the decrees of a wise and good God, which the very heathens, out of regard to his honour, did ever refuse to do?" If they believed a fatality of events, without regard to man's behaviour, they imputed it to the deficiency of matter, and not to the decrees or will of God. How could the Fathers of the Christian church have written against the doctrine of fate, if they had believed, with the moderns, that all things, sin not excepted, were included in Jehovah's eternal decree? They proved that the doctrine of fate defeated the use of all laws,—left man no use for his reason,—subverted the order of human life,—superseded all motives, and left no place for hopes or fears. With what invectives, then, would they have assaulted the fate which is founded in a decree of evil. Pagan fate involved the gods, as well as men, within the compass of its necessity, and freed God from voluntarily willing or decreeing man's sin, and thus was more easy to the mind than that which traces all our own sin and misery to the Creator's voluntary and arbitrary decree. Is this any thing short of impiety? "How outrageously

do these men reproach Heaven whilst they believe those crimes and villanies decreed by that august senate and glorious court in heaven, which, had any city upon the earth decreed it (them), had deserved to have been damned by the common vote of mankind."*

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* See Lucas on Happiness, p. 128. The whole chapter well deserves a reading, from p. 111 to 140.—See also Hunt on "Fate and Destiny Inconsistent with Christianity."

In the Conversations of Erastus and Trophimus, it is asked, "What is the difference between the foreknowledge of an omniscient and almighty Being and his predestination?" To this it is replied, "With respect to men, the terms are not interchangeable; but in relation to the Supreme Being, they are synonymous." The attempt of Erastus to prove this is extremely weak. Because God is omnipotent as well as omniscient, and controls all events as he pleases, he takes it for granted that there can be no difference "between what he foreknows and what he purposes." "If God were only a partial governor of the world," says Erastus, "things might take place without his actual purpose." Thus God must either partially give up his government, or be considered the decretive author of all the moral evil found among his subjects. I use his words in reference to himself, "How absurd, indeed, if stated at length!" Is not Erastus inconsistent with himself, or do I misunderstand him? He says, "*Every* thing is the result of previous appointment. If God be omniscient and almighty, nothing can happen unforeseen by him, or which he could not have prevented; it will follow, therefore, that *all events* are of his preordination." Is not this language universal, "Every thing—all events"? Yet he immediately excludes sin, and declares that the idea of its emanating from God is absurd, as its tendency is "to destroy the order and peace of his government; and it is not supposable that what in its nature opposes the government and very being of God, has God for its author." Yet he observes, that "prophecies shew that God controls mundane affairs, and also that events take place for certain previously-concerted and ordered purposes,—that occurrences, whether small or great, whether they concern 'a nation or a man only,' and whatever appearances they assume, are actually

SECTION III.

The certainty of Divine Foreknowledge neither destroys man's liberty, nor causes the events that are foreknown.

If the Scriptures clearly and unequivocally assert two propositions, we have no alternative, though we see not their consistency, but to yield an implicit faith, or deny the divinity of the Bible. If man is not free, his conduct cannot be worthy of praise or blame. He that acts only as he is acted upon, is rather a passive machine than a rational, responsible agent, and the reward of his conduct is due, not to himself, but to the agent by whom he is actuated. Every man's conscience attests his own freedom. He feels that he possesses liberty. Every instance of self-accusation or self-approbation is an argument in favour of self-control.* If we have no choice or

the result of pre-arrangement." "Are not men rich or poor, low or elevated, weak or powerful, obscure or illustrious, according to the purpose of God?" As these stations are often the fruit of improper measures, it should seem that Erastus still maintains that all events, sinful ones not excluded, are the result of a divine purpose, what pains soever he may take in asserting that God is not the author of sin.

* "Now, we are assured, from the *knowledge and experience we have of our own constitutions*, that in a vast number of cases that occur wherein we act from a RATIONAL NECESSITY, and are determined only one way by the prevailing motives of *fitness, goodness*, and *agreeableness*, that yet we *act freely*, or with a *true and proper liberty*, and that, because there is all the *complacency and delight, all the pleasing tendency and acquiescency of mind, all the harmony and consent of thought*, that we ever experience on any occasions wherein we can reckon ourselves to act with the truest *freedom*, or

possibility of acting differently to what we do act, we may feel grief and regret, but not any true repentance or self-condemnation. A self-judging mind admits the apology, *I could not help it.* By denying the free agency of man, we give up his accountability, renounce the distinction between virtue and vice, and deny the necessity of a future judgment; and a denial of divine foreknowledge is, in effect, a denial of the very government, perfections, and existence of Deity. The certain prescience of God, and the unshackled freedom of man, must both be maintained. Every event will certainly come to pass, as to time, place, and circumstances, exactly as it is foreseen, without any infringement upon the liberty of man, or the doctrine of contingency.* Contingence, or chance, and absolute certainty of foresight are incompatible in the divine mind, im-

that we can conceive to be necessary in order to the making or denominating a power, to be a power of ACTING FREELY.

"If the real intrinsic nature of liberty does not lie here or hereabouts,—if this be not sufficient, in the nature and reason of things, to denominate ACTIONS FREE, then no actions that we can ever exert, let them be what they will, can possibly be either justly *rewardable* or *punishable, by God or man;* and if we once come to that, we need not dispute about *liberty* or anything else."†

* "The divine prescience being only the knowing of all things that were to come, does not infer a necessity, for if it did, then all human actions would be necessary, and the freedom of man's will destroyed; all future recompenses would be discarded, and virtue or vice become empty names; since there would be no blame, no punishment due for doing what we could not help; nor any praise, no reward imputable for doing what we could not avoid."‡

† Ditton on the Resurrection of Christ; Appendix, p. 566. London, 1712.

‡ Stackhouse· Body of Divinity, p. 155. 2nd edit. fol.

plying a contradiction, or that the same thing could be certain and uncertain at the same time and under the same circumstances. This would suppose that to be known which is unknowable, and that that which would most certainly come to pass would not, or might not, most certainly come to pass. But contingency, with respect to creatures, is perfectly reconcileable with the absolute certainty of divine prescience. The events of to-morrow are contingent to us, but perfectly known unto the Lord.*

God inhabits eternity all at once, and fills immensity. Past and future, near and distant, are terms inapplicable to Deity. It is not more difficult to him to see the contingency of future events, than to see the events themselves. Indeed, he cannot foreknow the one without the other. Futurity and preteriety are the same to God. Events not yet transpired are as naked to him as those already past. "God exists," as Dr. Adam Clarke expresses it, "in all that can be called eternity; nothing can be future to him, because he lives in all futurity; nothing can be past to him, because he equally exists in all past time." He therefore sees at one view all things that have been already, as they are now, and as they will be to all eternity.

"To him there's nothing old appears,
To him there's nothing new."—*Watts.*

* "We must agree that the mere knowledge of any event, without any real influence from the power that knows, does not make the event necessary, whether it be foreknown or afterknown. If I foreknow that the sun will rise to-morrow, that has no more influence on the sun's rising than my afterknowledge that it rose yesterday."—(Watts's Works, vol. iii. p. 480. Leeds edit.)

The foreknowledge of God (it cannot be too often repeated) does not produce the event, nor the certainty of it, but is founded upon them. Man's foreknowledge of the rising and setting of the sun, moon, and stars,—of the time when eclipses will happen, and comets make their appearance, and of the ebbing and flowing of the tides, does not cause or influence them. The simple knowledge or foreknowledge of God, though absolutely and infinitely perfect, is not the cause, but the effect of the event.

Divine "prescience does not make the effects certain because they are foreseen, but they are foreseen because that they are to be; so that the certainty of the prescience is not antecedent or causal, but subsequent and eventual. Whatsoever happens, was future before it happened; and as it has happened, it was certainly future from all eternity, not by a certainty of fate, but by a certainty that arises out of its *being once*, from which this truth, *that it was future*, was eternally certain. Therefore, the divine prescience being only the knowing all things that were to come, does not infer a necessity or causality."*

"If, indeed," says an able writer, "the prescience of God and the freedom of man were absolutely *inconsistent*, it would follow, not that man's actions were not free, but that such actions as man's are were not the objects of divine foreknowledge." "But this is not the case. Foreknowledge, in itself, has no influence at all upon things foreknown, because things would be just as they are, and no otherwise, though there was no foreknowledge. The

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* Burnett on the Articles, Article 17.

futurity of free actions is exactly the *same*, and, in the nature of things themselves, of the like certainty in event, whether they were or could not be foreknown. God's foreseeing that any action will be done does not at all hinder its being free, because his foreseeing things to come does no more influence or alter the nature of things than our seeing them alters them when they are."*

Herod acted freely in seeking *the young child to destroy him*, though God foreknew it, and warned Joseph to depart into Egypt, to escape the intended destruction. Judas acted voluntarily in betraying the Redeemer, notwithstanding his conduct was both foreknown and foretold. Jesus foreknew and foretold Peter's denial of him, and the repetition of it, and the very time, but that was no cause of his conduct, but an admonition to him to be upon his guard. So Peter understood the warning, and at the time resolved to abide faithful even unto death. Yet he proved the certainty of the Redeemer's foreknowledge, in connexion with his own freedom and the contingency of human conduct. When Elisha told Hazael before hand what ravages he would commit, he answered, *What, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing;* yet he did it, and did it freely, voluntarily, and deliberately. Even the foretelling by name that such a man will perform a certain action, or commit a specified sin, leaves that person at full liberty to act as he pleases, as might be instanced in the case of Herod, Judas, Peter, and others. Divine foreknowledge has no influence upon the person, nor is it the cause of his sin or punish-

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* Stackhouse: Body of Divinity, fol. p. 87.

ment. That Judas would betray Christ, and that he would go to his own place, was foreknown and foretold, yet neither his sin nor his punishment is attributed to the foreknowledge of God, but to his own choice and transgression. These are assigned as the cause why he fell from his office, and why he went to his own place, and to shew he had not come there by any antecedent decree, but by his own transgressio .*

SECTION IV.

The difference between the Foreknowledge and the Fore-appointment of God, stated and prove l.

It has been clearly shewn that God not only foreknew what would actually take place, but what might have occurred if he had permitted, or had he adopted some other plan in creation and providence, and that many of his decrees arise from his foreknowledge, and consequently his foreknowledge in those instances is not founded on his decrees. It has also been admitted that, as the decrees of God are absolute, and his foreknowledge universal and certain, every event will infallibly take place in exact accordance with divine foreknowledge. This has been proved irrelevant to the question, as events absolutely certain to God may be contingent to us.

Though the distinction between the foreknowledge and the decrees of God has already been proved,† yet it may not be deemed superfluous to glance briefly at their difference in point of *nature*, *influence*, and *extent*.

* See Hunt on God's Decrees, p. 170, &c. † See chap. v.

They differ in their *nature*.

To decree is an act of the divine will, an exercise of volition, depending wholly upon the pleasure of God. He was at liberty to decree or not to decree, unless divine purposes arise of necessity from the divine nature. If God was not free to decree, he could not be free to act, and consequently he cannot be praised for the fruits of his grace in the salvation of his people. This would overturn all our notions of the freedom and sovereignty of his favour. His decrees, then, are voluntary—the offspring of his good pleasure. "He has mercy on whom he will have mercy." "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." Decrees are, therefore, limitable, being bounded by the sovereign will of their Author: they are, in number and measure, just what God willed them to be. "Nor is it admitted that the actions of God are, in themselves, necessary, but only that he has a necessary existence; for scripture itself testifies that his decrees, and therefore his actions, of what kind soever they be, are perfectly free."*

Divine prescience is very different. It is a perfection of the Deity, arising, not from the exercise of his will, but from the absolute infinity and eternity of Jehovah. It is necessary to his very existence. He cannot be otherwise than the all-seeing and all-knowing God. Knowledge and foreknowledge are natural and essential to him. He could as soon divest himself of truth, justice, and holiness, as of prescience. Bounds and limits may, with the same propriety, be fixed to the infinity of his nature, and to the duration of his existence, as to the extent of his foreknowledge. He cannot even will to

* Milton's Christian Doctrine, pp. 35, 36.

be ignorant of any thing, past, present, or to come. He can set bounds to his decrees, and fix limits to the operations of his power and of his grace, but not to his foreknowledge; that being, like his holiness, a natural, necessary, and immutable perfection of his nature, independent of the exercise of his will. The distinction, therefore, between the nature of prescience and that of fore-appointment, appears demonstrably evident.

They differ in point of *influence.*

Divine decrees are accomplished by divine agency. Jehovah gives birth to every object of his own purpose. The works of his hands declare the purposes of his heart. His operations and his counsels are commensurate in their extent. His decrees are the rule of his own actions. He works all things after the counsel of his own will. All his perfections are engaged for the certain and unfailing accomplishment of all his decrees. The purpose of God, according to election, must stand, and he will do all his pleasure. "I HAVE PURPOSED IT, I ALSO WILL DO IT." "The foundation of God standeth sure." Being the only wise God, and infinitely powerful, he will see to the fulfilment of his own decrees. Divine decrees give existence to their objects, and render them absolutely certain, or the divine will would be frustrated. Events that would not otherwise ever have taken place, are efficiently caused to exist in consequence of divine purposes. The creation of the world, the existence of angels and men, the redemption and salvation of sinners by Jesus Christ, are the fruit of his ancient counsels. What he decreed in eternity he effects in time. All his doings, in heaven and earth, are according to the good pleasure of his will. "The

Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought so shall it come to pass, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand." And elsewhere it is written, "The Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" His decrees, therefore, are the ground of all his own works. Upon the supposition of his perfect wisdom, rectitude, and absolute immutability, he must fulfil or accomplish them. To suppose the contrary would indicate a change of will, or a want of power.*

The conclusion is evident, that the decrees of God have a direct influence in the production of their objects, which cannot truly be affirmed of prescience. Things simply foreknown are accomplished by the agency of his creatures, in the use or abuse of their delegated and responsible powers. "His (God's) prescience no way imposing upon them (men) a necessity to transgress. For they do it, not because he foreknew it, but he only foreknew it because they would do so. And hence he had, as it was necessary he should have, not only this for the object of his foreknowledge, that they would do amiss and perish; but the whole case in its circumstances, that they would do so, not through his omission, but their own." †

* "Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, which comprehends whatever he himself works or wills singly, not what is done by others, or by himself in co-operation with those to whom he has conceded the natural power of free agency."—(Milton's Christian Doctrine, p. 30.)

"God decreed nothing absolutely which he left in the power of free agents; a doctrine which is shewn by the whole canon of scripture."—(Ibid. p. 31.)

† Howe's Works, vol ii., p. 272. 1822.

God's foreseeing that anything will take place, has no influence upon the event. The futurity of free actions is the very same, whether known or unknown. Foreknowledge has no more influence upon events than afterknowledge. God has an intimate knowledge of the state of our souls, of all the affections, passions, springs, and weights wherewith they are moved; and knows infallibly how every possible object that presents itself will determine our judgment and choice, exclusive of any decretal influence.* The foreknowledge of astronomers, respecting the heavenly bodies, has no more influence upon their motions, than the ignorance of the common people. To foreknow and foretel events is very different from decreeing and causing them. God decreed Jonah's safety and his gourd, but not his anger and his sin, though all were equally foreknown.†

* See Stackhouse's Body of Divinity.

Thus Milton wrote—

"They therefore as to right belonged,
So were created, nor can justly accuse
Their Maker, or their making, or their fate,
As if predestination overruled
Their will, disposed by absolute decree
Of high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
Their own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
Which had no less prov'd certain unforeknown."
"So without least impulse or shadow of fate,
Or ought in me immutably foreseen,
They trespass, authors to themselves in all,
Both what they judge, and what they choose, for so
I form'd them free, and free they must remain,
Till they enthrall themselves; I else must change
Their nature, and revoke this high decree,
Unchangeable, eternal, which ordain'd
Their freedom; they themselves ordained their fall."

They differ in point of *extent.*

I can readily admit that God foreknows, but not that he *fore-ordained*, "whatever comes to pass." Some contend, that whatever was the object of a prediction, must, for that very reason, be the object of a decree. This, however, is begging the question, and taking for granted the point in dispute. Can we believe that all the wars and wickedness of men were appointed of God? I see no unavoidable or necessary connexion between man's sin and God's decree. He can surely see the end from the beginning without being the decretal cause or occasion of sin. When good is predicted, foreknowledge is founded upon decrees, because what God effects

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"God's prescience has no influence at all on our actions. Should God, by immediate revelation, give me the knowledge of the event of any man's state or actions, would my knowledge of them have any influence upon his actions? Surely none at all. Our knowledge doth not affect the things we know, to make them more certain than they would be without it. Now foreknowledge in God is knowledge. As, therefore, knowledge has no influence on things that are, so neither has foreknowledge on things that shall be. And consequently, the foreknowledge of any action that would otherwise be free, cannot alter or diminish that freedom."—*Whitby.*

"God's prescience is not the cause of things future, but their being future is the cause of God's prescience, that they will be."—*Origen.*

"This is the true resolution of this difficulty, that prescience is not the cause that things are future, but their being future is the cause they are foreseen."—*Le Blanc.*

Dr. Clarke and Dr. Watts speak to the same purpose, and represent "foreknowledge as having no more influence on things known, to make them necessary, than afterknowledge."—See *Edwards's Works*, vol. i., p. 240.

The word *necessary*, in this connexion, has an unhappy effect; it should have been defined. Foreknowledge of certain future events must undoubtedly include the necessary existence of those events, in a certain sense, or else the foreknowledge itself could not be certain.

and works in time he purposed in eternity. The redemption and salvation of man, the downfal of Antichrist, and the overthrow of Satan and his empire, could not have been foretold if God had not in his own eternal mind previously appointed those events. But good and evil spring from two very different sources; so does the foreknowledge of them: both of them, however, in their causes, existence, nature, and degrees, are equally and perfectly foreknown to the Lord. Evil is the object of foreknowledge, but not of a decree. The decrees of God are restricted to those events which he himself, directly or indirectly, produces, but his foreknowledge extends to all events, without any exception even to "whatsoever comes to pass."*

I conclude, then, that there is an evident distinction between the decrees and the foreknowledge of Jehovah, in point of *nature*, *influence*, and *extent*.

It must now be left with the impartial reader to judge for himself, whether the argument to prove that the foreknowledge of God is founded exclusively upon his decrees, and that therefore they may be identified in point of extent, has not been fairly and amply discussed, and satisfactorily confuted. The universality and absolute certainty of God's foreknowledge has been admitted, but it has also

* The late Dr. Williams, speaking of Hopkins's "System of Doctrines contained in Divine Revelation, explained and defended," says, "The celebrity of the author would have rendered this work much more popular and useful, had he kept clear of a bold and grating sentiment,—'that God has *fore-ordained* all the moral evil which does take place;' and which he endeavours to defend with more ingenuity than success."—Appendix to the Christian Preacher, p. 305.

been shewn that that foreknowledge is founded only in part on divine decrees, it arising principally from the absolute and infinite perfection of the divine nature. Hence, the prescience of God is general and universal, but his decrees are special and particular, being limited to his own works.

The reader will also form an opinion, whether it has been proved that the absolute certainty of divine foreknowledge is perfectly compatible with the liberty of man and the contingency of human actions. Let it, however, be remembered, that the reconciliation of these points does not exclusively belong to predestinarians, but is equally required from all who admit the universal and absolute prescience of Jehovah.

CHAPTER VII.

OTHER ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF THE UNLIMITED EXTENT OF THE DIVINE DECREES, STATED AND EXAMINED.

SECTION I.

God's Creating and Sustaining Power and Influence considered.

A THIRD argument in favour of the universality of divine decrees is contained in the following language:—

"God gave existence to all things; and as no being can live, move, act, or think, without his concurrence, aid, and influence, therefore all the events that transpire, being under his control, are the fulfilment of his eternal purpose."

The premises here laid down are perfectly correct, but they do not necessarily support the conclusion. If it be proved that God works all things, there can be no sin in the world, unless God himself be the author of it. Some writers trace effects up to causes, till they arrive at the Great Supreme, just as the Evangelist traces the genealogy of Christ from Joseph to "Adam, who was the son of God." These make Jehovah as much the cause of all events which transpire, as the author of the existence of Adam.* "God, the first cause, began the series" of all events.† "God is the sole ruler and guider of

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* Tucker on Predestination, pp. 5, 8. † Ibid. p. 17.

events, and that none exist but such as are agreeable to his sovereign will and pleasure."* "We maintain, not only that God is the sole ruler and guider of all events, but that he actually determined their existence, the time when, the manner how, and the place where, from eternity."† Are these things so? Can a holy God determine, rule, and guide all the sinful events which transpire? Is he the first cause of all the wicked actions of men? Can he be the positive, absolute cause of moral evil? Did he direct and guide all the circumstances and events which led to the murder of righteous Abel? Did he actually determine from eternity, the time when, the manner how, and the place where that horrid deed should be effected? Who will not startle at the idea? The writer already referred to, says, "As the nature and the properties, the causes and the consequences, of things were equally present to God, these also *must* exist, operate, and come to pass, by *virtue* of his *sole* determination."‡ Thus all the iniquity in the world comes to pass *by virtue of God's sole determination.* Is not this a libel on the holiness, truth, and sincerity of God?

I dispute not the universal providence or government of God. All creatures were formed, and are ruled and over-ruled by him. By him the whole creation is upheld and preserved. Without him a sparrow falls not to the ground. He is everywhere present, doing his pleasure, and none can stay his hand. In him we live, and move, and have our being. I may allow, without hesitation, that a man could not lie, nor blaspheme Jehovah's name, nor get drunk, nor walk to places of sinful amusement, if God did not uphold him and give him the use of

* Tucker on Predestination, p. 14. † Ibid. p. 17. ‡ Ibid. p. 35.

his tongue, of his hands, and of his feet. But in allowing this, I deny the accuracy of the conclusion, that therefore all events were pre-appointed or decreed by the Ruler of the universe.

Man is the creature of God, and entirely dependent upon his Maker for life, and breath, and all things. It may therefore be said by my opponents, that "God would not leave his conduct and fate undetermined: and having fixed upon the end or destiny of every man, he would appoint means for the accomplishment of that end. And, as he is the first cause from whom all beings and energies are derived, he, of course, in setting the grand machine of the universe in motion, would determine, fix, and limit the actions and exercises of every part."*

In replying to this, the principal part of it may be allowed without admitting that God decreed the sins of men. We know, and readily acknowledge, that man is entirely dependent upon his Maker; that his body, his senses, his reason, his power to move, speak, see, smell, and hear; to eat, drink, wake, and sleep, are derived from God, and might be suspended any moment. This is all granted. Man cannot blaspheme God, nor curse the king, nor bear false witness: he cannot smite his fellow-servant, nor commit theft, adultery, &c. without

* Mr. Foster, the celebrated Essayist, in his Essay "*On the application of the term* ROMANTIC," says, "This disproportion between the powers and means which mortals are confined to wield, and the great objects which all good men would desire to accomplish, is a part of the appointments of Him who *determined all the relations in the universe, and he will see to the consequences.*" (p. 235. 8th edit.) How far the words which I have put in italics involve the doctrine of unlimited decrees, let the reader judge.

the exercise of a power derived from God. Men could not write and publish blasphemous and vile books, if God did not continue to them the use of their faculties. But it should be remembered, that the possession and the free use of this power are essential to our accountability, and to the very existence of virtue or vice. Deprive man of reason, and you reduce him to the state of the brutes; and take away the use of his senses and the power of motion, and you place him on a level with a stone. Grant to man all that he has, and place him independent of his Maker, and you elevate him above responsibility. For man, therefore, to be man, a moral agent accountable to God, and the object of praise or blame, you must suppose him endued by his Creator with human powers of body and mind; and in so far as his Creator withholds either, in so far he is not accountable.* But surely we shall not charge God as being accessory to our crimes because it appears that we cannot sin without his sustaining hand. We should not be moral agents were not this the case. Shall it be said, therefore, that God ordained sin, because it could not have been committed if he had not given being and opportunity to his creatures? To say we cannot sin unless sustained by Jehovah, is merely saying that we are not independent beings. A man cannot spend that which he has not, nor can he see without eyes, nor speak without voice. But all this does not in any

* "Man is not determined by any intrinsic *necessity* to do this or that, but is himself the author of his own actions." "For where an absolute freedom of choice is wholly taken away, there, not the man who acts, but he who imposed upon him the necessity of so doing, is to be reputed the author of that action."—(Puffendorf, book i. chap. i. sect. 9, 10.)

wise affect the argument—man could never have sinned if God had not made him.* Shall God, on this ground, be censured for creating man? Surely not. Deprive man of his power, and he *cannot* sin; grant him his power, and man *charges* his sin upon

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* "It seems infinitely to detract from the perfection of the ever-blessed God to affirm he was not able to make a creature of such a nature, as, being continually sustained by him, and supplied with power every moment suitable to its nature, should be capable of acting unless whatsoever he thus enables it to do, he determine (that is, for it can mean nothing less, impel) it to do also. And except it were affirmed impossible to God to have made such a creature, (that is, that it implied a contradiction, which certainly can never be proved,) there is no imaginable pretence why it should not be admitted he hath done it, rather than so fatally expose the wisdom, goodness, and righteousness of God, by supposing him to have made laws for his reasonable creatures impossible, through his own irresistible counteraction, to be observed, and afterwards to express himself displeased, and adjudge his creatures to eternal punishments for not observing them."

"I am not altogether ignorant what attempts have been made to prove it impossible; nor, again, what hath been done to manifest the vanity of those attempts. But I must confess that I feel a greater disposition to wonder that ever such a thing should be disputed, than to dispute so plain a case; and that a matter whereupon all moral government depends, both human and divine, should not have been determined at the first sight. It is not hard for a good wit to have somewhat to say for any thing. But to dispute against the common sense of mankind, we know, beforehand, is but to trifle, as the essay to prove the impossibility of local motion. The notion of the goodness and righteousness of God, methinks, should stick so close to our minds, and create such a sense in our souls, as should be infinitely dearer to us than all our senses and powers; and that we should rather choose to have our sight, hearing, and motive power, or what not besides, disputed, or even torn away from us, than suffer ourselves to be disputed into a belief that the holy and good God should irresistibly determine the wills of men to, and punish the same thing."—(Howe's Works, vol. ii. pp. 249, 250. 1822.)

his Creator. Suppose man to be a different being, or to be confirmed in a state of perfect innocence, and we suppose a new world, of which we can form no adequate conception. Man's dependence upon God for his existence and capacity has no connexion with the idea of his sin being decreed and fore-appointed. God has endued man with certain powers and capacities, and placed him in a state of freedom, bounded by the obligation arising from the relation in which he stands, and the commands which he has given him. For the use and abuse of the abilities given him, man is accountable to his Maker.* But

* An eminent writer lays down the following propositions:—

"That God exerciseth a universal providence about all creatures, both in sustaining and governing them.

"That, more particularly, he exerciseth such a providence about man.

"That this providence about man extends to all the actions of all men.

"That it consists not alone in beholding the actions of men, as if he were a mere spectator of them only, but is positively active about them.

"That this active providence of God about all the actions of men consists, not merely in giving them the natural powers whereby they can work of themselves, but in a real influence upon those powers.

"That if men do then employ them to the doing of any sinful action, by that same influence he doth, as to him seems meet, limit, moderate, and, against the inclination and design of the sinful agent, overrule and dispose it to good. But now, if, besides all this, they will also assert that God doth, by an efficacious influence, move and determine men to wicked actions, this is that which I most resolvedly deny."—(Howe's Works, vol. ii. pp. 295, 296. 1822.)

This acute and learned author very elaborately contends, that though God's prescience of the sins of men may be reconciled with the wisdom and sincerity of God in the means he uses to prevent

this will not prove that God is either the influential or decretal author or cause of the abuse of the power, privilege, or ability, by which he is rendered accountable for his conduct. All the native talents of the mind, the genius, the wit, and the understanding which are employed in the service of sin and Satan, are derived from God, and sustained by him; but it does not follow from hence that God ordained them to be so employed. The moral liberty of man supposes his existence, his capabilities of thinking, choosing, speaking, and acting. Take away liberty and power, reason and choice, from the creature, and you take away responsibility. Nor can any action be considered as virtuous or vicious, but as it is voluntary, and as the agent was possessed of ability to have acted otherwise. Reward and punishment can have no place if our works are the fruits of mere necessity. Liberty and choice suppose the existence of mind, the sustaining power and agency of God, and the endowments of reason, judgment, will, &c. Volitions and actions for which man is responsible and blameable, must not be invincibly determined by any foreign cause and influence whatever, though the man is sustained and supported by divine power, and could not otherwise exercise thought or perform any action.*

sin, yet the determinative concurrence to all actions, even those that are malignantly wicked, can never be reconciled with the wisdom and righteousness of his laws against them, and the severest punishments of them according to those laws. Reason and revelation confirm his statement.

* "A man hath from God the powers belonging to his nature, by which he is capable of loving or hating an apprehended good or evil. These powers being, by a present divine influence, ren-

God does influence man to good in pursuance of his purpose or decree, and leaves the will of the sinner free, but in this case we ascribe the effect to God. He works in his people to will and to do according to his good pleasure. But it will not be pretended, I presume, that he thus works in the minds of the wicked to will and to do iniquity, according to his good pleasure. The sin of the sinner is his own, and is that which God commanded not, nor purposed, nor came it into his mind to decree or effect it.

I therefore conclude that no solid argument can be brought from the universal creative, sustaining, and preserving power of God, to prove that he decreed or works moral evil ; or that he has "unchangeably foreordained whatsoever comes to pass:" nay, that the principle, followed out to its legitimate consequences, would destroy the accountability of man, and render God the doer of all things, and

dered habile and apt for action, he can now love a good name, health, ease, life; and hate disgrace, sickness, pain, and death. But he doth also, by these powers thus habilitated for action, love wickedness and hate God. " I say now, that to those former acts God should over and besides determine him, is not absolutely and always necessary, and to the latter is impossible."—(Howe's Works, vol. ii. p. 297, 1822.)

This sensible writer was opposed and charged, as I have been, with denying or limiting the providence of God, because he would not allow " that it is the stated way of God's government to urge men irresistibly to all that wickedness for which he will afterwards punish them with everlasting torments."—(Ibid. p. 294.) He denies a decretive, or, as he calls it, a determinative influence, or concourse from God, in the production of wicked actions. Certainly God is passive with respect to the sins of men, but energetically active in the production of all that is good.

the only object of praise or blame in the whole universe.*

SECTION II.

The argument founded on the nature of the Divine Will considered.

The fourth argument employed in defending the universality of God's decrees, is derived from the nature of the Divine will, which is said to be two-fold, secret and revealed. And it is affirmed that God's secret will is fulfilled by every event, and that therefore every event is included in his decrees.

"The distinction of the *secret* and *revealed* will of God," says Dr. Gill, "has generally obtained among sound divines."† There is "some foundation for this distinction, yet it is not quite clear." "The most accurate distinction of the will of God, is into that of precept and purpose, or the commanding and decreeing will of God."‡ "God's will is either secret or revealed, purposing or commanding; the one is the rule of his own actions, the other of his creatures. Now it oftentimes is so, that what ac-

* "Some persons have been pleased to call God *the Doer of all things*, but certainly on no scriptural authority. Whatever mystery there may be in the abstract question, how a being can be created so as to act independently of the Creator, it is certain that our Maker considers us, and that we feel ourselves to be so constituted. Our actions are our own, and not God's. Whatever measure of independence is necessary to render our actions our own, God has given us, so that he is not the doer of our deeds."—Hinton's Harmony, p. 91.

† Body of Divinity, p. 50. London. 1815. ‡ Ibid. p. 51.

cords with the secret and purposing will of God is a disobedience to his revealed and commanding will." Again, the same writer quotes, from Dr. Manton, the following language:—"Things that are most against his revealed will fall under the ordination of his secret will, and whilst men break his commandments they fulfil his decrees: his revealed will sheweth what should be done—his secret will what will be done."* "Let us note the distinction betwixt God's will of decree, and his will of command. That such a distinction must be made between these two wills, is clear and manifest from many Scriptures."† "In many instances the children of men have violated the *revealed will*, whilst they have in the same actions fulfilled the *secret purpose* of Jehovah." After reference to Jacob's conduct towards his father Isaac, and that of his sons towards their brother Joseph, it is considered that the position advanced is proved, namely, "that the children of men may violate the revealed, whilst fulfilling the secret will of God."‡ "We say, God may decree one thing and command another. If they will call this a contradiction of wills, we know that there is such a thing."§ "No hypothesis whatsoever will relieve a man, but that he must own these two wills of God."‖

Such is the statement made by those who main-

* Dr. Gill: *Cause of God and Truth*, vol. i. p. i. chap. i. section 3.

† Stephens on Original Sin, p. 62. London. 1658.

‡ See Herbert's Sermon on Divine Prescience Reviewed, and highly commended in New Evan. Mag., vol. viii. p. 277.

§ Edwards's Works, vol. viii. pp. 386, 387.

‖ Ibid. p. 391. On the same point see vol. i. p. 386, &c.

tain that God's decrees embrace moral evil. It requires a considerable portion of temerity to call in question the opinions of such men as President Edwards and Dr. Gill; and especially as they have the suffrages of the great body of Calvinistic writers. Let it, however, be remembered, that truth is not to be decided by numbers; nor is it exclusively and necessarily the inseparable attendant of talent and learning.

There may be some degree of propriety in ascribing to God a secret and a revealed will; not, indeed, as opposed or contradictory, but as the same will, first hid in God, the counsel of his will, and then revealed, or made known, to man. Scripture language warrants such a distinction. "The mystery which was kept secret since the world began, is now made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith."* Thus that which was the secret, becomes the revealed will of God. Though God has revealed in the Bible whatever is needful for us to know, in order to our peace and salvation, yet we dare not conclude that he has disclosed all the purposes of his heart. Many of his counsels will be developed in succeeding generations, and perhaps throughout the countless ages of eternity. His gracious designs shall be more and more disclosed by the dispensations of his providence. It may not be well for us to be acquainted with the times and seasons which he has reserved in his own power. "Secret things belong to God, but things that are revealed belong to us, and to our

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* Rom. xvi. 25, 26.

children." But this distinction is altogether irrelevant to the question under discussion, and very different from a will that decrees a thing to be, and another will which commands the same thing not to be.

Many things take place in our world that are forbidden by the law of God. These we say are contrary to his will. How can we say of these very things that they were eternally willed by him, and rendered certain by his irresistible decree? If the counsels and commands of Jehovah clash and contradict each other, will it not reflect upon his consistency and sincerity? Is not the sentiment dangerous in its tendency, furnishing the sinner with an argument in favour of his disregard, disobedience, and contempt of divine commands? Does it not appear like reproving God, or at least charging him foolishly?

Apply this sentiment, for example, to the fall of man, and we may affirm that the decreeing will of God was, that Adam should fall, sin, and die; the commanding will was, that he should stand, obey, and live. "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Had God, notwithstanding this plain declaration of his will, another will, whereby this commanding will should be frustrated, and rendered entirely ineffectual? It is allowed by those who maintain a *double* will in God, that the will of his command is *often broken*, but the will of his purpose *never*. But how then shall the lawgiver, who had a secret effectual will, different to his command, reprove the

transgressor? "Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? Because thou hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it, cursed is the ground for thy sake—dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Suppose we carry with us the decreeing and commanding will of God into this sentence of condemnation, may it not then be very properly considered thus? "Because, Adam, thou hast, by transgressing my righteous command, fulfilled my secret purpose, my absolute decree, which can never be changed or frustrated, therefore my curse shall come upon thee, and upon thy offspring. Thy transgression, notwithstanding my will of command to the contrary, is what I designed, willed, and appointed in my eternal counsels, and therefore is well pleasing to me, though I punish thee for thy conduct." This representation, which I judge to be fair and impartial, will apply not only to that act of "disobedience, which brought death into our world," but also to all the crimes which have since been perpetrated by the children of Adam. How different is this representation to that which God has given upon his own solemn oath? "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." Surely it will be no easy task to reconcile the decree of the Almighty, that sin *shall* be, with his prohibition that it *shall not* be.*

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* On this question President Edwards has expressed his opinion in the following language:—"Whether God has decreed all things that ever come to pass or not, all that own the being of a God own that he knows all things *beforehand*. Now it is self-evident, that if he knows all things beforehand, he either doth *approve* of them, or he doth *not* approve of them; that is, he either is *willing*

The counsels and the commands, the purposes and the precepts of Jehovah are set at variance with each other.* God wills the sin which he con-

they should be, or he is *not* willing they should be. But to *will* that they should be is to decree them."†

This language would require explanation. It is vague and indefinite, and the inference drawn from it is altogether gratuitous. If by *all things* be meant only real positive entities, then the language may be justified; but if by *things* are meant also defects, failings, or, in other words, moral evil, then the words are improper, and the argument inconclusive and false. "To will that they should be is to decree them," is only true with regard to *real* entities, or, in other words, to that which is good. If God were the decretal cause of moral evil, by "willing it should be," the will of the immediate agent would be only the instrument of the first will, in producing an intended or decreed event. If there be no failure in the creature but what is decreed, it is impossible to avoid the consequence that God is the primary author of sin. If decreed by him, he must also be the efficient cause of it; for whatever he decrees he effects: and notwithstanding any kind whatever of instrumentality employed in its production, the human will, or anything else, he could no more disapprove of it and hate it, than he does lightning and earthquakes, or any other event which he appoints and effects. The decrees of God are *holy* like himself; but to suppose a decree of moral evil, is to suppose an effect not only different from, but *contrary* to, its cause, which is really incompatible.‡

* *Doolittle*, in his Catechism, has these questions and answers: "But doth God know that any thing will be, that he doth not will or decree shall be? No. But God knoweth what is possible to be, though he doth not will or decree it shall be? Yes. And you think so for this reason, because the knowledge of God that anything *may be*, is not the cause that it *shall be;* but because it is the will of God that such a thing shall be, therefore God knoweth it will be? Yes."§

Here, again, we see the will of God made the cause of every event. It is so because he wills it. Apply this to the conduct of

† President Edwards's Works, vol. viii., p. 384. Leeds edition.

‡ See Dr. Williams's Notes to ditto. § Page 115. London edit. 1673.

demns. His revealed will commands obedience, and his secret will prevents compliance.* A certain writer remarks, "The will of God is God himself willing; it is essential to him—it is his nature and essence." "The decreeing will of God is always done, cannot be resisted, frustrated, and made void;

the prisoners tried and condemned in a judicial court. Let it be pleaded before the bar: This man committed murder, and that man theft, because it was the will of God they should do so. Such particular crimes would not have been committed had it not been the will of God. Let the counsel for the prisoner advance this doctrine in behalf of his conduct, or in excuse or extenuation of his crimes, and what would be the feeling and sentiment of the whole court?

* "Even that which is against the will of God, cometh not to pass without his will. God willing the being of that which he willeth not to effect, and though he esteem not evil to be good, yet he counteth it good that evil should be."†

It may be asked, How could God decree, by his secret will, that Adam should fall, before by his revealed will he had commanded him to stand? In his revealed will he says, "Eat not," but in his secret will he says, "Eat; thou shalt eat." Thus God's two wills are not only different, but opposite. Could Adam serve two masters, one commanding him to stand, the other, not commanding indeed, but determining him to fall? The secret will is the controller, and certain to be accomplished, whatever the will of command may say to the contrary. Thus obedience to one will exposes to the penalties of disobedience to the other. When one will says, *Obey*, the other determines he shall not obey. Does not such a sentiment go far to neutralize the whole revelation of God? Men may say, "These Scriptures are but the revealed will of God, and it is very possible his secret will is the very reverse of it. He saith so and so, in his word, but his meaning is not so."‡

† Perkins on Jude, vol. iv.

‡ See Stephens on Original Sin, chap. x., p. 60. London. 1658. This author has treated this question at large, and said as much as can be said in support of a double will in God.—See also Edwards's Works, vol. viii. p. 385.

he does whatever he wills;* his counsel stands fast for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations." † Limit his decrees to the production of good, and this may be affirmed; but extend them to moral evil, to the disobedience and wickedness of men, and who dare affirm that God either wills or works them? The above writer says, respecting sin, "that the will of God is some way or other concerned with it, is most certain, for he either wills it or not wills it; the latter cannot be said, because nothing comes to pass, God not willing it.‡ God's foreknowledge of sin most fully proves his will in it. God foreknows that such and such things will be, (viz., such and such sins will be, for of sins the author is treating,) because he has determined in his will they shall be."|| Jehovah, if this be correct, wills sin; but his will, according to this author, "is his very nature and essence," therefore it is of the very nature and essence of God to will sin; and as "the will of God is always efficacious,

* *He does whatever he wills*, and, according to this author, he wills the existence of moral evil or sin, and therefore *he does it*.

Nearly to the same purpose is the language of another writer: "For a thing is not just, and then God willeth it; but God willeth it, and then it is just; his will being the cause of things, and the rule of all right."—(Parr on Rom. ix. 14—16. London. 1618.)

† Dr. Gill's Body of Divinity: Art., Will of God. Toplady has expressed himself in similar language.

‡ Lam. iii. 37.

|| Dr. Gill.

Did God will or desire the conduct of Cain to Abel, of Joseph's brethren to Joseph, of Potiphar's wife to that amiable youth? Did he will the Butler's neglect of Joseph? Did he will the sin of David, in the matter of Uriah, as he did David's repentance? And the oaths of Peter, as he did his godly sorrow?

is always effected,—never made null and void," he has, by decreeing sin, rendered its existence, in all its extent and varieties, inevitably certain. Thus sin is represented as derived from the purpose, decree, or *will* of God, and that *will* is identified with the divine nature, and so it is traced up to the very essence of God.

"The will of God is his essence."* Then God wills necessarily whatever he wills. This not only represents the divine nature as the source of evil as well as good, but virtually destroys the idea of sovereignty and grace in the bestowal of good. Salvation, on this principle, springs not from divine favour or choice. If ascribed to his will, his will is his essence; and that essence is a necessary one, which cannot be otherwise than it is; and, therefore, God could not do otherwise than save those he saves, nor otherwise than damn those who are lost. He had no choice; all that he has willed into existence—the world, with all its furniture, inhabitants, &c.—all the men and angels he has formed—necessarily spring from his own existence; and God could not, in any one instance, without a change of his very essence, have willed or acted different to what he has willed and acted. He is made the fountain from which all moral evil as well as good proceeds.† Into such absurdities do some

* Dr. Gill, Body of Divinity; and Tucker on Predestination, p. 35.

† "If God were a necessary agent in the works of creation, the creatures would be of as necessary being as he is; whereas the necessity of being is the undoubted prerogative of the first cause. *He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will,* saith the Apostle; and wherever counsel is there is election, or else it is

men drive themselves by obstinately maintaining some error they have previously avowed, or rather than relinquish what they suppose essential to the consistency of their creed.* How different is this to the language of the Bible—"Thou art not a God that hast pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee." "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity. Is there unrighteousness with God?" Yea, say some, he is the fountain from whence it springs. He has decreed it all, and his decree is his will, and his will is himself. God forbid that the thought should ever be indulged, even for a moment. From the Most High proceedeth not evil and good.

Such principles and practices as indicate the internal design to be different from the declaration of the lips, are universally condemned among men, where there is any sense of probity and sincerity. The moment that we imagine a man's heart does not agree with his tongue, we lose our confidence in him, and our esteem for him. Solomon seems to refer to this when he saith, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee,

vain; where a will is, there must be freedom, or else it is weak."—(Pearson on the Creed, pp. 62, 63. London, 1662.)

* "The decrees of God are the free acts of his will, concerning such future things as are subject to his power, and they are sometimes called his will—a term never applied to natural and necessary things. Those who would make the decrees of God entirely and identically one with his essence, destroy his freedom in such decrees, and make them the effects, not of deliberate choice, but of the most absolute necessity; since, if God's essence be necessary, and his decrees be the same with it, then must they both have absolutely one and the same necessary foundation."—(Stackhouse, Body of Divinity, p. 155.)

but his heart is not with thee."* The Lord saith, "Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."† Dare we add to this, "But his heart is not with thee"? Would it not approach the borders of blasphemy to make the supposition? Shall we charge God with want of affection and sincerity, with guile and deceit in his most pressing commands and invitations; and also with a secret determination that his invitations shall be rejected, and his commands disregarded and disobeyed?‡

* Prov. xxiii. 7. † Isaiah lv. 2.

‡ "It is hard," says an excellent writer, "to suppose two contrary wills in God—the one commanding us our duty, and requiring us, with the most solemn obtestation, to do it, and the other putting a certain bar in our way, by decreeing that we shall do the contrary. This makes God look as if he had a *will* and a *will*, though a heart and a heart import no good quality when applied to men. The one will requires us to do our duty, and the other makes it impossible for us not to sin. The will for the good is ineffectual, while the will that makes us sin is infallible."§ Thus the good pleasure of his will expressive of his decree is opposed to the good pleasure of his will expressed by his command. Such things among men, who surely are not more just than God, would be properly charged with duplicity and want of sincerity. To confine a man in a prison, and then require him to walk at large, seems unreasonable; and especially if the confined prisoner is to be punished with everlasting destruction for disobedience. "And is there no resemblance," it has been asked, "between this statement and what the most orthodox say on the subject? The gospel is preached,—man is called on to believe; he does not; they say he rejects, and will be punished for rejection; and yet the same persons say he cannot believe without an enlivening impulse, altogether independent of himself."

This may be the language of some, but I judge they are not *the most* orthodox. Yet it *is*, or it is *not* correct, according to the sense in which the word CANNOT is understood. If it is meant to signify a natural impossibility, it is then altogether erroneous, as repre-

§ Burnet on the Articles: Art. xvii.

The sentiment of two contrary wills in God appears, not only to reflect on the Most High, but to be absurd. How can two wills directly opposite exist together? They cannot both be the pleasure of God. Whereas Jehovah says, "I will do all my pleasure." Supposing, but not admitting, that he wills the death of a sinner, yet he commands him to repent and live. Can these be reconciled? The case of Abraham, being called to offer up his son, has been produced as a proof of the contrariety of Jehovah's purpose and command; because the event shews that there was no purpose in the Divine mind to have Isaac slain. The language of the command is, "Offer him there for a burnt offering." This Abraham did. The command and the action agreed. So it is expounded in the New Testament. "Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that received the promises, offered up his only begotten son." I see not here any difference, but a perfect agreement, between the secret purpose of God and the letter of his command. God purposed and commanded that Isaac should be offered up, and so he was. Where, then, is the disagreement?*

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senting God condemning man for the neglect of that which it was never in his power to perform, no more than to create another solar system, or to hold the waters of the ocean in the hollow of his hand. But if it is intended to convey the idea that man *cannot* believe because he will not, or because he has no inclination, or because he hates the gospel, then I conceive the language is proper, and man deserves to perish, because the impulse mentioned is not necessary to give him power, but inclination; not to give him a hand, but a heart; or, in other words, to remove the perversity of his disposition, in which his great sin consisteth.

* A friend, who kindly read the MS., submitted upon this part the following remarks :—

"It is desirable to set the subject of this section, if possible, in a

Is it not trifling to make that the will of God's purpose which is supposed contrary to his will of command? If the secret be his will, then not the revealed, otherwise the secret is not his will; or, if the revealed, then not the secret will, otherwise the revealed is not his will. Is it not dangerous to oppose God's words to his thoughts—his revealed commands to his secret decrees? Is not sin in direct contrariety and opposition to the secret will of God? If God, in his thoughts and secret counsel, approves and wills sin, but in his word forbids it, then he is good only in appearance, which surely we shall not affirm of the Holy One of Israel. I conclude, therefore, that the secret and revealed will of God, or the will of his purpose and the will of his command, are not contradictory, but perfectly harmonious.

clearer light. The *secret* and the *revealed will* of God may differ, but can never be *opposed*. What do we mean by his *revealed* will but is command—his legislative will—what he requires us to do or avoid? In doing what he commands, we do his will, in the strictest sense of the terms. But in expressing his will as a legislator, he does not absolutely will or decree that we must do it; but leaves us at liberty to do or not to do as he requires. But his *secret will* means what he determines to do or not to do in reference to his creatures in the foresight of all their circumstances and character, both as to the bestowment of favours and the exercise of judicial control. But these are invariably consistent. Foreseeing the violation of his revealed will, in some case which could not be prevented without the destruction of their moral freedom, he may *secretly* will or determine to overrule such violation in subservience to an ultimate and greater good. But he does not, therefore, by a secret will constrain the creature, in such a case, to violate his *revealed* will any more than a king, who secures the liberties of his subjects, may be said to constrain criminals to transgress the laws. If I set my son an important task, and give him proper directions for its performance, it is my sincere *will* and desire, as a parent,

SECTION III.

God's Decree to permit Sin, considered.

It is contended, that "whatever God permits to take place in time, that from eternity he decreed to permit; and that this, though not exactly the same, is equivalent to his having foreordained whatsoever comes to pass."

In support of this position it is said, "If God wills to *permit* a thing that it may come to pass, then he wills that it should come to pass." "God has decreed that he will permit all the sin that ever comes to pass, and that, upon his permitting it, it will certainly come to pass."* It is hence inferred that the existence of sin in the world is a sufficient

that he should do as I require, though I cannot absolutely compel him to do so without depriving him of liberty, and preventing that moral development of his powers which the task is designed to effect. But knowing his disposition and circumstances, and thence anticipating certain deviations from my command, I *secretly* will and determine to leave him to his own choice, and to do so and so in consequence. Now supposing the event to turn out as I expected, the case would be exactly parallel to the relation in which we all stand to the revealed and secret will of the Deity, and shews a plain and palpable line of distinction between them. It is true we are more absolutely dependent on God for all the powers and circumstances of our being than any son can be upon his father. But since it has pleased God to place us in a state of moral agency, and to intrust us with powers for which he holds us accountable, our choice and our actions must be as much our *own* as though the dependence were nothing more than the dependence of a subject or a son. God, therefore, sincerely *wills* us to do all he commands, and to seek all he promises, though in the foresight of our voluntary neglect he has a *secret will* what shall be done or not done in consequence."

* Edwards's Works, vol. viii. p. 393—403.

proof that Jehovah wills it, or, which is the same thing, that he decreed to permit it.

It is contended that, in reality, there is no essential difference between divine appointment and divine permission. If God does not prevent evil when he could, he allows it. He that could prevent a person from drowning, but does not, is supposed to will or approve it. "God," they say, "has certainly power to hinder sin, and would do so if its existence was not according to the good pleasure of his will. To deny its fore-appointment does not remove the difficulty arising out of its existence, for it could not be if the Lord had determined the contrary." When pressed with consequences, they say we must leave the subject until the day of final retribution. We shall know better when we get into another world. They are determined, for the sake of their darling hypothesis, to have their own way, though they leave the character of Jehovah under an odium which they would scarcely attribute to any of the rulers of the children of men.

This same objection, and many others of similar import, were urged against Ursinus long ago. "To permit," said his opponents, "is either to will or not to will. Wherefore, to permit is the same as to will, and by a consequent, God, when he permitteth sin, doth will sin."*

That God has permitted the introduction of moral evil into our world is an undeniable fact. No iniquity has taken place, or can take place, among angels or men, but by divine permission. The Lord suffers or permits the daily and hourly trans-

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* Sum of Christian Religion, by Zacharias Ursinus. London, 1611.

gressions of his holy law. But it does not follow that to permit and to decree is one and the same thing. God is not bound to prevent sin, for that would, in case of sin's existence, leave all the blame of it with him. Thus the Creator, and not the creature, would be under bonds. When God decrees, he effects the end decreed; when he permits, he lets his creatures take their own course, without his interference.

But, allowing that sin exists and prevails by divine sufferance or permission, will it necessarily follow that God *decreed* sin, or *decreed to permit* sin? In deciding this question, it will be proper to define or explain the phrase *decree to permit,* from which I judge it will appear that the idea intended cannot be attributed to Jehovah, and that the language itself is improper, useless, and absurd.

To decree, as applied to God, is an *act* of the divine will, a determination of the Eternal Mind, respecting the production or prevention of a certain being, action, or thing. Thus explained, the word *decree* does not well accord with the word permission.

The term *permission* does not give us the idea of doing or performing any thing, but of suffering something to be done by a non-interference. It means not to prevent—not to hinder. Those persons who do not approve of the naked proposition, that God decreed sin, and who endeavour to free themselves from the obnoxious sentiment, by saying, "He *decreed to permit it,*" do not by that means escape from the difficulty. It is a mere evasion. A decree to permit, if it could exist, is a decree to do nothing, which amounts to the same thing as not to decree at all. The

very terms do not accord. The one conveys an active and positive idea, the other a passive and negative one. None would consider the phrase, "the permission of sin," to signify leave, or right, or toleration, as Government gives permission to persons to sell or use certain taxed articles, under the direction of the Board of Excise. That would amount to a license to transgress his laws, which God has not granted or given to any of his creatures. His permission of sin, therefore, can only mean that he did not prevent it. This is the fact, with respect not only to the first sin, but of every subsequent transgression to the present time. This idea is very clearly and beautifully expressed by Paul and Barnabas, speaking of the living God, "Who in times past SUFFERED all nations to walk in their own ways." They were their *own* ways, and they *chose* to walk in them, and God *permitted*, SUFFERED, or did not *hinder* or *prevent* them. Thus it is said, also, concerning Israel, that "About the time of forty years *suffered* he their manners in the wilderness." This permission of sin cannot be the object of a decree, because what God decrees he approves, wills, and effects; which cannot be said of what he barely permits. Melancthon takes great care to assure us, that the words of scripture, from which one might infer that God was the author of sin—as these, "*I will harden the heart* of Pharaoh"—ought not to be considered but as a permission, and that this expression, according to the *Hebrew* phrase, means only, that "*I will permit the heart of Pharaoh to be hardened.*"*

* Dupin, History, Lives, Writings, &c., book vi. chap. i.

To permit and to decree an event cannot be the same thing. To will or decree a thing, is to desire it; but if God desire the existence of moral evil, how can he hate and forbid it, or threaten with eternal death the transgressors of his law? To decree to permit, or to will to permit sin, is a solecism in language, or at least it is hardly intelligible. There needs no decree, no act, or exercise of will in the bare permission of any event, when it is seen that the event will take place if not prevented. To prevent evil, or to counteract it, or to decree to do so, requires an exercise of the will, an act of the mind, but to permit evil implies nothing more than a non-interference. There needs no decree, for instance, to permit a dumb man to be silent, or a dead man to be inactive; because these will be so without any act or interference. To permit, to suffer, not to hinder, in respect to the existence of moral evil, implies no positive exercise of the divine mind. God only lets the sinner have his own way. If Jehovah decree to permit, and thus wills moral evil, the sinner cannot be the author of his own sin. In transgressing the law of God he is only the instrument of the first moving will, in producing the decreed and fore-appointed event. Will not this lead to a conclusion sufficient to overturn any doctrine or sentiment from which it is legitimately inferred, namely, That God is the primary author of sin? From a consideration of the nature of a decree, and of the nature of permission, it may safely be concluded that a divine decree to permit sin is contrary to reason, and unsupported by divine revelation.

SECTION IV.

Examples and Texts from the Holy Scriptures, in support of the universality of Divine Decrees, examined.

FACTS and statements are adduced from the Scriptures, which, it is said, prove that God's decrees are universal. To the consideration of these the reader is now directed.

The history of Jacob and Esau has been urged to support the conclusion, that God had decreed the ruin of Esau, and consequently his sin, before he was born. But let the oracle of Deity to Rebekah, respecting Jacob and Esau, either in their persons or in their posterity, be carefully compared with the prediction concerning them by the prophet Malachi, and with the use the apostle has made of both in his Epistle to the Romans,* before it be hastily concluded that God had appointed either Esau or his posterity to commit certain specific sins on earth, in order that he and they might be eternally punished for them in hell. The texts, either separately or in connexion, do not prove the doctrine. The prophet Malachi has no reference to any eternal appointments, but to the wickedness of Esau, or Edom, and of God's indignation against them for that wickedness, as a just and inevitable consequence. "They shall call them, the border of wickedness," and therefore they shall also be called "The people against whom the Lord hath indignation for ever." The indignation of the Lord is represented as subsequent to their wickedness, and founded upon

* Gen. xxv. 23; Mal. i. 2—5; Rom. ix. 10—13.

it. It is not said that he *had*, but that he *hath* indignation for ever. Sin is the procuring cause of punishment. But could that be the case if sin were divinely appointed? Will any persons have the temerity to say that Esau and his posterity are eternally damned for the commission of fore-ordained sin? This case does not appear relevant, and would not, I conceive, bear a severe scrutiny on the the just principles of reason and revelation, much less prove that the decrees of God include moral evil. Milton observes, that "Mention is frequently made of those who are written among the living, and of the book of life, but never of the book of death."*

The history of Joseph is pleaded as an argument that all the events connected with it, including the sin of his brethren, and that of Potiphar's wife, were settled and decreed in the counsels of eternity; and that they took place according to the secret purpose of God. The language of Joseph to his brethren is urged in support of this: "God did send me before you to preserve life; to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God. But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people."† Does this language represent their conduct as decreed of God? I cannot perceive it. "God did send me before you. It was not you that sent me hither, but God. God meant it for good." These are the strongest terms employed. To what do they amount? They teach, not a decree of moral

* Christian Doctrine, p. 45.

† Gen. xlv. 5—8, l. 20.

evil, but the doctrine of an overruling providence. Jehovah designed, in permitting the envy, malice, and wickedness of Joseph's brethren, to let them discover what was in their hearts, and to overrule the whole, so as to raise Joseph to honour and power, to preserve Jacob's family, and to promote his own glory. This was acting like himself. But cannot God hold the reins of universal empire in his hand, and make all events subservient to the fulfilment of his own counsels, without being considered as accessory, by his decrees, to the sins of men? All the good connected with Joseph and his history, by whatever agency effected, must be ascribed exclusively to God. "He meant it for good," or he would not have suffered the evil. He checked and controlled the actions of all parties, to bring about the fulfilment of his own decrees. This he does respecting all the sins of angels and of men. He makes even the wrath of man to praise him, and the remainder of wrath he restrains. In the case of Joseph's brethren, he permitted them to abuse and sell him, but not to murder him, as they purposed and proposed. In that particular their wrath was restrained. He suffered him to be tempted by his mistress, but not to be overcome; to be cast into prison, but not, like the baker, to be destroyed. Infinite wisdom and Almighty interposition are seen through the whole affair. God appears watching at every turn to shew himself strong on Joseph's behalf. His purposes were eventually unfolded, and the words that he spake to Abraham, that his seed should dwell in a strange land, were fulfilled. Joseph's brethren meant one thing, but Jehovah meant another. The whole story is most admirably calculated to teach

us the infinite wisdom of God in the permission of sin, and in its limitation by his all-pervading and uncontrollable power. But there was no necessity to decree the sin, or to decree to permit it. Joseph's brethren, if not effectually hindered, will hate him, persecute and sell him; and his mistress, if not restrained, will tempt him, accuse him falsely, and obtain his committal to prison. An impartial examination of the whole history will convince an unprejudiced mind that the sin committed by the parties was not, and could not, be preordained of God; unless, indeed, he must be charged with contriving and appointing the wickedness of man, because he watches, prevents, and checks its progress, so as to fulfil his own most gracious designs. The wisdom, power, goodness, and holiness of God are eminently displayed, and will be eternally admired, not only in what he performs, but also in what he permits, and in what he prevents.* "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

The case of Job is urged as eminently bearing upon this question; and an appeal is made to his own language: "But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth. For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me, and many such things are with him."†

* From the history of Joseph, Job, and others, it may be clearly proved that God's foreknowledge is not exclusively founded upon his decrees, but that, in many particulars, his decrees are founded upon his foreknowledge of the sin of the parties, whose designs he determined to frustrate.

† Job xxiii. 13, 14.

It is much easier to make an affirmation than to prove it. Let clear evidence be given, by sound reason and holy scripture, that sin was preordained, and the point is decided. But I do not perceive any such evidence in the case, or in the language of Job, to warrant the conclusion, that God decreed his sin, or the sin of his companions. I know that Jehovah's mind is one, and not double; one, and changeth not;—that he doeth "whatever his soul desireth," in heaven above, and on the earth beneath;—that he performeth for Job, and for every one, "the thing that is appointed for him." This is the very doctrine that I maintain—namely, that God performs and works whatever he appoints; and, on this ground, I contend that sin was not appointed by him, because he will not perform it. No serious person will contend that God did in very deed appoint Satan to tempt and harass Job,—the Sabeans to carry away his property,—his wife to give him wicked counsel and to desert him,—and his friends cruelly to accuse him, and to speak wickedly for God;—and, in a word, that Job himself should blame the Almighty, and bitterly curse the day of his birth, and every one that had any concern in bringing him into the world. Satan, so far from being appointed of God to distress Job, begs permission, which, with certain restrictions, is granted. His limits are fixed, beyond which he cannot proceed to touch either his person or his life. Here we perceive divine permission with respect to evil, and divine determination with respect to its limits or extent. All the good connected with the affair was decreed and effected by the Lord, but I dare not affirm the same with respect to the evil. It appears that Job's sin was afterwards matter of personal

humiliation and deep repentance. "Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee?" He abhorred himself in dust and ashes. It may be presumed that this was also the case with his friends. But their sorrows had been annihilated, or greatly lessened, if they had firmly believed that all they had said and done, the evil as well as the good, had been the result of a divine and an eternal decree.

Some have supposed that the case of Pharaoh will prove that his sin and ruin were decreed. God raised him up to shew his power, and that his name might be declared throughout the earth; and it is recorded that the Lord hardened his heart.

In reply, it may be remarked that the kingdoms of the earth are the Lord's, and he setteth up over them whomsoever he will. By him kings reign, though some of them have been, like Pharaoh, the basest of men. He putteth down one, and setteth up another, at his pleasure. He raised up Pharaoh, and in his providence elevated him to the throne of Egypt at an important crisis, and by a series of miracles gave him an opportunity of discovering, in his conduct, what was in his heart. By these miracles, and in the destruction of Pharaoh and of all the glory of Egypt, the Lord God illustriously displayed his power, and especially by the emancipation of Israel, whom he is said to bring out of the house of bondage with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. By these means the name of God has been declared throughout all the earth.

Nothing more can be inferred from the Lord hardening the heart of Pharaoh than that he did not soften it. He let him alone under circumstances peculiarly calculated to make him act like himself, and to discover the corruption, enmity, and pride

of his heart. It cannot be conceived for a moment that God, by any positive influence, infused into him any hardening quality by which he became more wicked and sinful than before. This would represent Jehovah as having fellowship with sinners, and not only consenting to their wickedness, but as being, by positive influence, the author of their crimes. The conduct of Deity towards Pharaoh, as in all similar cases, was only of a negative kind. So the apostle writes respecting the heathen: "God gave them up, and gave them over to uncleanliness—to vile affections—to a reprobate mind."—(Rom. i. 24, 26, 28: Psalm lxxxi. 12.)* He let them alone, did not restrain or hinder, but suffered them to proceed according to their own inclinations. Nothing more than this, in connexion with the very extraordinary circumstances in which Pharaoh was providentially placed, can be intended by the phrase, "The Lord hardened his heart." The Lord "hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." Hence "he turned their heart to hate his people," on which words Dr. Gill says, "Not that he put any hatred into them; there was no need of that,—there is enough of that naturally in

* "Provoked by their long stubbornness, I took no further care of them, but left them to do as they pleased, saying, let them follow their own inventions."—(Bishop Patrick on Psalm lxxxi. 12.)

"—— To be delivered up to their own hearts' lust is worse than that,—nay, than to be delivered to Satan: salvation may be the consequence of that, but damnation of this; and yet it is a righteous judgment; for as men like not to retain God in their knowledge, it is but just with him to give them up to vile affections, to a reprobate mind, to do things not convenient. There is nothing men are more desirous of than to have their hearts' lusts, and there is no greater judgment can befall them than to be left to the power of them."—(Dr. Gill on Psalm lxxxi. 12.)

every man's heart against good men, and all that is good; but he did not restrain that hatred as he could have done, but suffered them to let it have vent."*

Other individual cases have been referred to as giving countenance to the notion that all moral evil is included in God's decrees. Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, was left of God to follow the pride and haughtiness of his own mind. He soon discovered the bias of his heart, listened to foolish and vain persons, refused the wise counsel of the old men, and therefore the people revolted from under his government; and by this means the word of the Lord was fulfilled. Amaziah, being not restrained of the Lord, but left to act according to the dark depraved state of his own heart, fell into idolatry, then rejected the counsel of the Lord, and threatened the prophet, saying, "Forbear, why shouldst thou be smitten?" The prophet therefore pronounces his doom: "I know that God has determined to de-

* "Hardness is an estate of a corrupt heart, whereby it is disposed to evil, yielding no obedience to God; and it is threefold. *First, Natural,* which is the estate of all men; *Secondly,* That which is contracted by *custom* of sinning, as a path is hardened by continual trampling of passengers. *Thirdly, Judiciary,* which God inflicteth upon men as a judgment. This is here meant. God is said to harden, not by making soft hearts to become hard,—for Pharaoh's heart was never but hard,—nor by putting hardness into the heart, but by *forsaking,* not taking the hardness away. He hardeneth, that is, he softeneth not. 2. By *punishing.* For finding the heart hard, (if he please not to pardon it, and to soften the heart,) he inflicteth a new hardness as a punishment of the former,—this he instilleth not,"—by giving them over to Satan or to themselves, and not blessing the word to them, which, not properly, but accidentally, is a means of hardening them; as a restive horse, the more is spurred forward, the more he goes backward.—(See Parr on Rom ix. 17, 18. London, 1618.)

stroy thee." But the reason assigned is, not God's eternal decrees, but the king's sin. "Because thou hast done this" wickedness, "and hast not hearkened to my counsel."

The case of a lying spirit in the mouths of Ahab's prophets will not prove any thing beyond simple permission. These prophets were the determined enemies of God and of Israel. The Lord therefore gave them up to strong delusions, as he has since done the abettors of Antichrist. He did not restrain or hinder, but suffered, the spirit that sought the ruin of Job; even "the adversary who walketh about seeking whom he may" deceive and "devour, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience," to influence their pre-disposed minds to prophesy lies. Ahab had filled up the measure of his iniquity, the Lord therefore suffered him to be persuaded by lying prophets, who acted under the influence of an evil spirit, according to the inclination of their own wicked hearts. There was not any positive influence from God, nor any evidence that the sin of the prophets, or of the lying spirit, or of Ahab, was pre-ordained of the Lord.

Some texts of scripture, particularly the two following, have been adduced to prove that the sin of man was fore-ordained of God. Jesus Christ is "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient, whereunto also they were appointed."

That many stumble at the word cannot be disputed. This may be viewed either as an act of disobedience, as it is, simply considered in itself, or as a punishment for former disobedience. Christ is set for the falling of many in Israel, and his gospel is the savour of death unto death. The Jews, for

their wilful and actual rejection and crucifixion of Christ, were left to stumble at the word, and to bow down the back alway, and to fill up the measure of their sins, until the wrath of God came upon them to the uttermost. They persisted in saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us," and in imprecating his blood upon them, till God said, "Amen," and sealed their doom. Thus God punished sin by *suffering* them to sin. "As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him: as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him."* As themselves have decided, so shall it be. "The election obtained" righteousness or salvation, while "the rest," according to divine predictions, "were blinded." "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you."† For their rejection of the Saviour and his gospel, they are left to stumble, and fall, and be broken; whereunto such characters *for their disobedience were appointed.* Some, who have sinned against the greatest privileges and the clearest light, who have despised the only begotten Son of God, and made light of the glorious gospel, are suffered to walk according to their own wicked inclinations, to fill up the measure of their iniquity, and, finally, they are justly punished with everlasting destruction. For their previous sins "God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." This appears to be the sense of the text.‡

* Psalm cix. 17. † Acts xiii. 40, 41.

‡ "It cannot signify that God absolutely ordained the unbelieving Jews *to disobedience;* for then this disobedience would be a com-

The other text introduced to prove the decree of moral evil is contained in the epistle of Jude: "For there a certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation; ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ."

It is not said that they were ordained to sin, but to condemnation; and that ordination is founded upon the foreknowledge of their character. They are ungodly men, most awfully so, v. 8 to 16. Certainly the wicked are of old appointed to suffer, to be driven away in their wickedness, and to be turned into hell. "Upon the wicked he shall rain fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup." They shall. not stand in judgment, nor in the congregation of the righteous. Hand may join in hand, but they shall not go unpunished. He that believeth not shall be damned. How can those escape who neglect and despise Christ, and his great salvation? There is nothing in this text but what is taught

pliance with the divine ordinance or will, and so could not deserve the name of disobedience; nor could this disobedience be objected to them as their crime, unless compliance with the ordinance and will of God be so, and it be a fault to be such as God, by his immutable counsel and decree, hath ordained we should be, nor should it render them criminal and obnoxious to punishment that they have not made void God's absolute decree, or done what that made it impossible for them to do. Wherefore this passage cannot signify that the unbelieving Jews were appointed to disobedience, but that being disobedient to the gospel, so clearly revealed, and by so many miracles, and distributions of the Holy Ghost, confirmed, they were appointed to the punishment of that disobedience which was to fall and perish. So the Hebrew and Greek word import."—(See Whitby on the text.)

throughout the whole Bible. Without controversy the wicked are appointed to condemnation. This doctrine was taught even from the days of Enoch, the seventh from Adam. Even then it was predicted and ordained that the Lord should come and execute judgment upon all the ungodly. Compare v. 4, 14, 15. But it cannot be proved from this text that God, irrespective of their sin, did ordain men to endless perdition and punishment before they had any being. Would it not be most horrible to conceive that God ordained men to sin, that there might be some show of justice in their punishment? Why not ordain them to punishment without the introduction of sin? The supposition of decretal sin, and then decretal punishment for it, is altogether contrary to reason, to our views of the purity, justice, and goodness of the Divine Being, and to the whole tenor of the Holy Scriptures. The doctrine of unlimited decrees, or that God has "foreordained whatsoever comes to pass," is therefore, on scripture ground, absolutely untenable.*

* On Jude, verse 4.; 2 Peter ii. 3; Prov. xvi. 4. See Milton's Christian Doctrine, pp. 15, 16.

CHAPTER VIII.

MORAL EVIL NOT DECREED.

The arguments in favour of the unlimited decrees of God having been refuted, a few reasons may now be adduced to shew that divine decrees do not comprehend moral evil. This may be argued from the nature of God's decrees, and from the moral tendency of the sentiment.

SECTION I.

The nature of Divine Decrees exclude Moral Evil.

The purposes of God are identified with the good pleasure of his will. To decree moral evil, therefore, is to will and desire its existence. But to take pleasure in sin is considered criminal. Sin lies in the purpose or will of the transgressor. The action is but the body or form of sin; the intention is the soul. To desire sin, and to take pleasure in it, are counted, among men, the very essence of iniquity. God delights in his own decrees, and in their accomplishment. Does he, then, delight in sin? Certainly he does, if it is the object of his decree. That he foreknew it, is one thing; that he fore-appointed it, is another. The foreknowledge, and even the permission, of an event, does not necessarily suppose any act of the will, nor any choice or desire of its accomplishment; but it may be the very reverse.

But fore-ordination implies the exercise and approval of the will. It is an expression of desire. Persons do not usually appoint that which they do not wish to come to pass.* If God, therefore, decreed sin, he must, of course, will and desire its existence. How far this will impeach the Almighty, as the author and approver of sin, and whether it is not incompatible with the unsullied purity of his nature, let the reader judge.

If sin is comprehended in the decrees of God, the actual existence of sin is secured by the agency of the Almighty. "My counsel shall stand, and I WILL DO all my pleasure." On this principle all the public and private sins of nations, armies, and communities; all the wars, murders, rapine, and oppression of tyrants; all the fines, imprisonments, and deaths inflicted upon saints and martyrs by the cruel hand of persecution; all the acts of whoredom, theft, and murder committed in our world, as well as all the fraud, deceit, dishonesty, and hypo-

* It may be said, that "people, if they have the power, usually prevent those things they do not wish to happen." But this reasoning is rather specious than solid. It is not universally true; and if it were so among men, it does not follow that it would be applicable as a rule of the conduct of Him who can overrule the evil conduct of his creatures to accomplish his own most gracious designs. Parents do not always prevent their children, even when they have it in their power to prevent them, doing that which is displeasing to them. They allow them money. The children spend it foolishly. The parents chide and reprove them, but they renew their gifts again and again. Now, could not the parents prevent this by withholding the money? Undoubtedly they could. But they do not, because they wish their children to act as free, moral, accountable agents. This instance is merely designed as a specimen. Others might be given, if necessary, to shew the fallacy of the argument, that God would prevent sin, if he did "not wish it to happen.'

crisy ever practised; in short, every breach of the law of God, and of man, were decreed of God, and are brought to pass according to the good pleasure of his will. It is a maxim, that few who believe in divine predestination will deny, that God, who decrees the end, decrees the means for the accomplishment of that end. This is abundantly evident in the salvation of his people. They are chosen to be holy and without blame before God in love,—chosen to salvation; but it is through the sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth. All the means of their conversion, faith, holiness, perseverance, and eternal glory were included in the divine purpose.* Whom he predestinated, them he also called, justified, and glorified. He prosecutes his own decrees from their commencement, through all the intermediate steps, to their full and final consummation. "We have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." This is the case with respect to every thing good. God appoints the end, and secures the use of proper means for its attainment. He is the first mover, agent, and worker in every holy desire, thought, word, or action, by which his decrees are accomplished. If Jehovah fulfils his own eternal decrees, and sin or moral evil be included in those decrees, then the various means to bring about the end, or the existence of sin, must also be included, and he must, by his own providence, so

* The Arminians generally misrepresent the doctrine of predestination, as if election to glory did not include the intervention of means; whereas the end and the means are infallibly secured by one and the same decree.

superintend, as to see that every step is taken to secure the accomplishment of his own purpose. To affirm this with respect to moral evil (which we must, allowing that it is decreed, and that God fulfils his own decrees,) would as much ascribe the evil and misery, as the good and the happiness, of man, to the Most High. It makes God the first cause of all evil, which is absolutely opposite and contradictory to his very nature. The supposition would put an end to all distinction between good and evil, and overturn the foundation of religion. For how can that be evil, or otherwise than good, of which God's decree is the first cause, and which he himself effects? Some who have written largely upon philosophical and religious subjects, have maintained that God sees no evil in the world, and that, in reality, there is none. This is following the hypothesis to its just and legitimate consequences. Is it possible that persons who regard the Bible, and are deemed orthodox, should be advocates of such a doctrine? Where is the sinner's guilt, and how, according to the Apostle's declaration,* can he be inexcusable?

To render sin certain and unavoidable, by an absolute and unchanging decree, and yet to forbid the thing decreed, upon pain of God's eternal displeasure, are incompatible, and cannot both be ascribed to the Lord. Jehovah can very properly forbid that which he foreknows men will, by his permission, certainly do; but how can he, consistently with truth and sincerity, forbid that which he has by his own immutable decree appointed them to do, and determined in his own mind that they *shall*

* Rom. ii.

do?* If God has ordained that a man shall commit a certain crime, how can he threaten that man with eternal death if he dare to commit what he has, by his own irreversible purpose and counsel, rendered absolutely unavoidable?

It has been maintained, by some persons, that God premoves the human will to its every volition. We know that sin takes its rise in the mind before it breaks forth in the life. "Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." If, then, all our volitions are by the premotion of God, and that premotion according to his eternal counsel, we attribute all our iniquities to the purposes and agency of the Lord Jehovah.

When we consider that there are seven abominations in the heart of man, and that from thence "proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies," can it be supposed, by any serious reflecting mind, that God is the first mover of these abominations?

If the existence of moral evil be included in the decrees of God, then he has fore-appointed that to exist which is the object of his infinite hatred. He forbids sin. "O do not that abominable thing which I hate." His wrath is revealed from heaven against it. He will take vengeance on those who disobey him, and punish them with everlasting destruction. But, why this hatred, these threatenings, and this punishment, if whatsoever comes to pass be unchangeably fore-ordained? The sinner

* See Howe on the Prescience of God reconcileable with the Sin of Men. He fully justifies the ways of God to man.

has done nothing which was not fore-appointed ; he has not deranged or broken any of God's decrees, or run contrary to the will of his Maker and his Judge. Does not Jehovah, according to the opinion referred to, work all things after the counsel of his own will? The sentiment charges the Supreme Being with fore-appointing the sin of man, then with commanding man not to fulfil his decree, and, lastly, with punishing man everlastingly for doing nothing but what his hand and his counsel determined him to do. The will of God, that is, the will of his decree, is perfectly accomplished by the sinner, and yet the sinner is condemned and punished for doing it. How inconsistent is this doctrine! How could the infinitely pure and holy God, who cannot look upon evil, and who hates all the workers of iniquity, give being by his decree to that which is the object of his absolute and unmixed detestation? As soon might we expect that light would become the parent of darkness, and fire the cause of frost; that water would change its course, and ponderous bodies ascend to the skies; yea, and that Satan would become the fountain of holiness, as to suppose God to be, in any sense, the parent or the cause of sin. To be informed that he who is glorious in holiness appointed and decreed sin, is not likely to create a hatred and detestation to it in the minds of men.*

* An inquirer may ask, "Suppose God intends to bring good out of all—and good which we may hereafter see could not so well have been brought about any other way—then every tongue would be stopped which utters a word against God, and every mouth would be opened to proclaim, 'He hath done all things well.'"

In reply to this, it is sufficient to say, that we are forbidden to do evil that good may come, or to conceive that the end will

SECTION II.

The moral tendency of the two opinions compared.

SINNERS, generally speaking, do not, in the perpetration of crime, regard any thing but their own inclination. "God is not in all their thoughts."* Yet it may be safely affirmed that many have felt in the practice of their ungodly deeds less remorse than otherwise they would from the consideration that they were thereunto appointed; and hence they are encouraged to proceed in the paths of iniquity, and to do evil that good may come.

"I know it may be alleged that some very pious as well as learned men have been of their (that) opinion. And I seriously believe it. But that signifies nothing to the goodness of the opinion. Nor doth the badness of it extinguish my charity or reverence towards the men. For I consider that as many hold the most important truths, and which most directly tend to impress the image of God upon their souls, that yet are never stamped with any such impression thereby; so it is not impossible some may have held very dangerous opinions with a notional judgment, the pernicious influence whereof hath never distilled upon their hearts."†

It is cheerfully admitted that many persons, who maintain that God has decreed the sins of angels

sanctify the means. And surely we shall not be guilty of charging that upon God which would be sinful in us, and which would incur his displeasure. Sin must not be justified, nor charged to the account of the Divine Being, because God can, does, and will, overrule it for good.

* Psalm x. 4.

† Howe's Works, vol. ii. p. 297. 1822.

and men, are not practically influenced by their opinion. But it is not the character of the persons who approve or deny the sentiment, nor even the influence experienced by them, but the nature of the sentiment, and the influence it is naturally calculated to produce, that is now under consideration:—Whether is the belief that God decreed sin, or that sin is not included in his decree, most calculated to produce cheerful and universal obedience to the will of God?

One says, "Sin is decreed;" the other, that it is only permitted. The latter allows that all sin was foreknown; the former contends that it could not be foreknown if it was not fore-appointed. As the tendency of a sentiment to promote holiness or sin is a corroborative evidence of its truth or falsehood, it cannot be unfair to put these opinions to the test.

Provided that men considered themselves as the creatures of God, and accountable to him for all they do, and would weigh the probable consequences of their conduct, what influence would the sentiment, that God had from eternity pre-determined all their volitions and actions, of whatever kind, be likely to produce upon them? The effect experienced would lead a person to reason in the following manner:—"If I am to do this thing I must do it; I cannot avoid doing it. I may, if the decrees permit me, try this and that method to act differently; but after all, I must just think, and speak, and act according to the fore-appointment of God. Labouring to avoid *this* and perform *that* is all in vain. As I cannot add one cubit to my stature, or make one hair of my head white or black, so I cannot break one link of the divine decrees, nor alter or change one purpose of Jehovah. If I

feel an inclination to abuse my own nature, to gratify my passions, to injure my neighbour, and disobey God; or if I yield to temptation, and commit crime, it is because I was ordained to possess those inclinations, to be exposed to those temptations, and to follow the former and yield to the latter; so that I therefore just fulfil the decree or pleasure of the Most High." Let it be observed that I am not here asserting that persons do actually, in all cases, act and reason in this manner; but the sentiment naturally leads to such conclusions. Let it be fairly stated in a correct way of reasoning, and the consequences unavoidably follow.

Suppose a person has been guilty of taking some imprudent step, or of perpetrating some horrid crime, and afterwards begins to meditate upon his conduct and upon its serious and lasting consequences; what effect will be experienced, if, for instance, he is fully persuaded that all events, without exception, were pre-ordained of God? Must he not conclude that his conduct is the fulfilment of Jehovah's purpose, and therefore must be acceptable and pleasing to him?* Enter into conversation with a condemned criminal upon the subject of his former life, and especially respecting the crime for which he is to suffer; endeavour to convince him of his guilt, and to bring him to repentance, and let

* Persons unhappily united in marriage have frequently had recourse to this sentiment—"What must be, must be. I often resolved not to marry my companion, but Providence always brought us in contact again, so that I could not shun my lot. I believe it was ordained, and therefore I could not help it." Thus the fault of a person's own imprudence and sin is cast upon his Maker, and he obtains false peace by impeaching the decrees of the Almighty.

him suppose that all his conduct was decreed of God,—how would you succeed? He might reply that he very much regretted the steps he had taken, by which he had become a reproach to his connexions, and had brought himself to an untimely end, yet he had no ground to repent of any thing he had done, because he had only fulfilled the counsels of Heaven. Every thing had been preappointed for him to do. He might ask, "Did not God, for his own glory, foreordain *whatsoever* comes to pass? It has come to pass that I have committed this crime, for which, by the laws of my country, I am condemned to suffer death. But both my sin and my death were among the things which were foreordained of God, and how then could they be avoided? I could not repeal the decrees of God, or change the counsels of his will. I have been merely the instrument by which his sovereign and irresistible purpose has been accomplished. My ensuing ignominious end is only another part of my destiny over which I had no control. The whole was unchangeably foreordained before the foundation of the world. Why, then, should I repent? I may lament my fate, that I should thus be appointed to sin and suffer, and especially that, in fulfilling the secret will of God, I should expose myself to everlasting misery. But still, may I not rather rejoice than grieve that I have not deranged the divine plans, but that every thing has come to pass according to the counsel of the Lord?"*

"Perverse mankind! whose wills created free,
Charg'd all their woes on absolute decree;
All to the dooming gods their guilt translate,
And follies are miscall'd the crimes of fate."
(*Pope's Translation of Homer, Book I., l.* 40.)

Thus the man who stains his hands in blood, who violently takes his neighbour's property and life, who indulges in uncleanness, and perpetrates every crime that lust and rage can prompt him to, has a soothing excuse prepared for him—namely, that he was pre-appointed by his Creator to this conduct. He may consider the instruments which he employs as criminal as himself, who is no more than an instrument in the hand of God to effect the divine purpose.

It may be said this reasoning is inconclusive; that the decrees of God have no influence upon the actions of the wicked; that, having no design to accomplish the purposes of Jehovah, they are equally criminal as if no decrees existed. This, however, is yielding the point contended for in these pages, as it either withdraws God's agency from the fulfilment of his own decrees, or it denies that moral evil is included in those decrees. Besides, such arguments will not convince the sinner. He may say to himself, "How could I do otherwise? The motive and the influence under which I acted, as well as the time, place, and circumstances of the action, were all included in the decree, because God has, for his own glory, 'foreordained *whatsoever* comes to pass.'

'I strive in vain with prayers to move
The inexorable fates above.'

My repentance and tears are only what Seneca calls 'the deluding dreams of a superstitious mind.'" Such reasoning, whether the sinner employs it or not, legitimately results from the premises.

The sentiment is calculated to preclude godly sorrow and true repentance, and to promote disobedience to God's revealed will. It quiets conscience, and lulls it into carnal security, by providing

an excuse for the sinner in his sins. When reproved, he may reply, in the language of an heathen poet, "It is not permitted us to shun our destiny, nor can any human prudence ward off its blows; nor can any thing but endless and fruitless troubles attend our contention with it." "They impute the heat and sallies of their lusts to the stars and to fate, being unwilling to charge themselves with the guilt of that which they own to be evil."

> "Whatever ill unhappy man sustains,
> Whate'er he doth, 'tis what his fate ordains."*

Such are the apologies for idleness and lust, and all manner of wickedness arising from our depraved nature, and cherished by the opinion that the whole of our conduct, bad as well as good, is in perfect accordance with God's unavoidable decree. The moral influence of the opinion is therefore opposed to holiness, and has the tendency of lessening the evil of sin.

Will it not have a greater tendency to promote truth, honesty, virtue, and pure religion, to assure the sinner that "wickedness," as saith the proverb of the ancients, "proceedeth from the wicked;" that "God tempteth no man;" that he has not decreed the transgression of his own law; that he has forbidden sin upon pain of his displeasure; that he will turn the wicked into hell; that he will punish with everlasting destruction them that know not God nor obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ? Jehovah commands and charges man to avoid sin. "Do not that abominable thing which I hate." "Provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands, and I will do you no hurt." "God is angry with the wicked every day." "The un-

* Tertullian. See Lucas on Happiness.

righteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God." "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "He that believeth not shall be damned." "Consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." These, and a multitude of similar texts, harmonize with the opinion, that moral evil is permitted by Jehovah, but not appointed. They have a happy tendency to cherish genuine sorrow for sin, watchfulness against temptation, resignation under chastisement, and gratitude for delivering mercy. But they lose their effect upon a mind imbued with the notion that all things, moral evil not excepted, are unchangeably foreordained. Such an one considers the purposes and precepts of Jehovah at variance, and cannot conceive why that which must inevitably take place should be forbidden. He, therefore, concludes that the oracles of God must, in their preceptive part, be explained by his purposes, and so arrives at the conclusion, that sinners are not bound to believe the gospel, and that believers are not under obligation to obey the moral law, and thus by placing some beneath, and others above moral obligation, he emancipates man from the moral jurisdiction of God. The doctrine opposed, if minutely examined, will be found, directly or indirectly, the parent of sentimental and practical Antinomianism. But a scriptural belief of the proper extent and nature of divine decrees promotes experimental and practical conformity to the will of God.*

* "Some have supposed," says an able writer, "that God has a contrary design respecting the non-elect, whereby he reprobates, rejects, or secretly frustrates the sinner's efforts to come to Christ for salvation; but the abettors of this opinion, we may safely conclude, know not what they say, nor whereof they affirm. If, in

SECTION III.

The same subject continued.

It may not be improper to notice, in a few distinct particulars, the baneful tendency of the doctrine under examination. I shall, however, only mention its influence upon repentance, humility, watchfulness, and confidence in God.

True repentance towards God is found in every real saint. Without it sinners can give no decisive evidence of true religion. But what is the nature of genuine repentance? Is it not godly sorrow for sin, arising from a broken and contrite spirit, heartily mourning before God? What views of the decrees of God are most calculated to produce and perpetuate this repentance? Would it be promoted by the conviction that our sins were all necessary to fulfil the purposes of Jehovah? that we

deed. it could be proved that God has such a reprobating decree, then a general call to sinners to repent, and believe in Christ for salvation, would be tantalizing and delusive. But God *does* call sinners to repent and believe, as every part of the New Testament shews: therefore, on the principle here resisted, one decree would *oppose* another, which is absurd. Whatever the all-wise God effects, is an index of his decree concerning it; he does call and command 'all men every where to repent;' therefore he decreed to do it. But surely he does not *effect* the blindness, impenitence, unbelief, and hatred of men, of which the cause is exclusively in themselves, and consequently there is no divine *purpose* to produce them."—(Dr. Williams's Essay, 3rd edit. pp. 190, 191.)

It may be said that this reasoning is similar to that which is employed against the doctrine of free and discriminating grace. "If favour," says the objector, "is conferred without reference to merit, what advantageth it me that I keep myself from evil, and walk in the path of virtue and holiness. After all my pains I may be ex-

have never done any thing but what he had predetermined we should do? Would such an impression of mind tend to open or shut the fountain of penitential tears? Let the reader judge. Surely we are led to weep most truly and bitterly for sin, when we view it as entirely our own,—as the fruit of our own choice, and the expression of our unprovoked and wilful disobedience to God. "The heart is deceitful, and desperately wicked," and will seek for excuses and extenuations of crime. It is not till refuge fails us, and we are deeply convinced that we have none to blame but ourselves, that we are ready to acknowledge our guilt. But when sensible that we have been led away with our own lust, and enticed, and that we deserve to perish, we then begin, with heartfelt contrition, to cry for mercy through the cross of a precious Saviour. But are these feelings excited or promoted by a persuasion that all our sin was made unavoidable by a divine decree?

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cluded from the kingdom of heaven, to make room for the Manassehs, and others who have sinned more deeply, but have nevertheless been made partakers of divine favour, which, on this system, is often conferred on the undeserving, and never because of any worthiness in the recipient.'

The judicious and candid reader will perceive a very material difference between the two cases. The one relates to the production, and subsequent punishment of sin; the other to the bestowment of undeserved favour. The former must certainly be under the regulation of justice; the latter, while providing for all the rights of justice and truth, is an exercise of divine and sovereign mercy. Surely the Lord has a right to do what he will with his own, and to bestow his favours as he pleases; but it cannot, on the other hand, be said that he has a right to punish, irrespective of the sin and desert of the sufferer. The sovereignty of God itself cannot inflict misery without the consideration of worthiness or desert in the delinquent.—(Heb. x. 29.)

Humility, that essential quality and clothing of a Christian, is not, I presume, promoted by the sentiment in question. It includes high and honourable thoughts of Jehovah, heart-melting views of the Saviour, a charitable opinion of others, and just thoughts of ourselves. God is considered as a Being of infinite purity, who cannot behold evil, nor look upon iniquity, nor have pleasure in wickedness, and who has forbidden sin in every form and degree, and declared that he hates all the workers of iniquity. The Lamb of God is beheld as taking away sin by the sacrifice of himself; the sinner, at the same time, looking upon himself as a wicked transgressor of God's righteous and holy law, feels his soul humbled within him. "Father," he says, "I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am unworthy to lift my eyes towards thy throne." He lays his hand on his mouth, and his mouth in the dust, and cries, "Unclean, unclean. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." "I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips—for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." This humility is connected with a belief of the truth, and a deep conviction of the evil of sin. Nothing can be more opposite, or more unfavourable to such a temper, than a belief that our sins were foreordained of God. This creates arrogance and presumption, or engenders resentment, hatred, and despair. Convince a man that his sins were all decreed before he was born, and you not only weaken but destroy the springs of his humiliation before God.

The notion that the decrees of God are of uni-

versal extent is less friendly to Christian *watchfulness, caution*, and *circumspection*, than the opinion that those decrees have good only for their object. It is to little purpose to exhort men to care and vigilance, if they are convinced that their actions are not their own, nor under their direction, nor within the control of their own choice. Persuaded that every event is previously settled, that they are under a necessity of acting, or forbearing to act, they feel themselves indifferent and unconcerned, and conclude that watching, striving, and resisting, are all to no purpose. Let a man feel himself a moral responsible agent, accountable to his Creator for his conduct; let him believe that he is not ordained to sin, nor impelled to evil, and there is ground to warn him of his danger, and to exhort him to watchfulness and prayer. Under such convictions, the Spirit of God leads men to shun temptation, to resist the devil, to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, and to guard every avenue of the heart, striving against sin. Knowing that their labour shall not be in vain in the Lord, they work out their salvation with fear and trembling, giving all diligence to make their calling and election sure. But a belief that all our sins are preappointed of God, is calculated, in its own nature, to render ineffectual every exhortation to practical godliness.

Confidence in God, resignation to his will under his fatherly chastisements, and cheerful obedience to his commands, are affected by the sentiments under consideration.

A firm persuasion that evil proceedeth not from the Lord, but that he is the prolific source, and the decretal cause of all good, encourages confidence

in his mercy, and reconciles the mind to his fatherly corrections. "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me; he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness." Here sin is acknowledged, and hope is indulged. The righteous God in faithfulness afflicts his children when they sin. Job, Eli, David, and all the saints, have confessed their sins under the chastising hand of their heavenly Father, and have been ready to say, "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" These views justify God, humble the sinner, and strike him dumb; they promote gratitude for sparing mercies and undeserved blessings, and prompt to cheerful and ready obedience. The sinner now confesses that he has destroyed himself, and his help is found alone in God: for his sin and ruin he blames none but himself. "I was not," says he, "compelled to rebel against God. It was not any secret decree, nor any force or influence from God, that impelled me to offend my Maker. I have no cloak for my sin. But, blessed be the Lord, there is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared. I will, therefore, declare mine iniquity, I will be sorry for my sin, and confide in his pardoning love. I will pray to him to enlarge my heart, and to draw me by his gracious influence, that I may lay aside every weight, and the sin that easily besets me, and run the way of his commandments with alacrity and delight." This language accords with sincere repentance, genuine humility, patient submission, cheerful confidence, and willing obedience. But can the man who believes that he has, from his birth, been fulfilling the secret irre-

versible will of his Maker—that his sins, as well as his services, were all unchangeably fixed and ordained in the eternal decrees of Jehovah; can he, I ask, employ the language of humble trust and penitence? Such a faith is calculated to cherish a secret murmuring against the Author of his destiny, and a carnal indifference as to conformity to God. Such an one may say, "I have sinned, but I could no more help it than I could blot out the constellations of heaven. 'There is neither wisdom nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord.' I am what I am, even as a sinner, by the irreversible decree and unbending purpose of the Almighty." The belief that God hath "fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass," and that he works all things, sin not excepted, after the counsel of his own will, would naturally lead to such conclusions. It may be said, that persons who adopt the principle do not exculpate themselves. But why do they not? Because they would be ashamed to do so; and hereby they prove, not only the inutility, but also the falsehood of the doctrine. It renders the threatenings, commands, and invitations of the Holy Scriptures not only useless, but absurd and ridiculous: it supersedes our prayers, our sincere confessions of sin, and all our strivings against it: and it represents the day of judgment as entirely unnecessary. The fair inference is, that its moral tendency is inimical to Christian confidence and submission, and to the glorious gospel of the blessed God.

It appears unnecessary to pursue this line of argument any further; otherwise we might shew what pernicious effect the belief in the universality of divine decrees is calculated to produce upon the mind of a sinner in his approaches to the throne of

God, either as a throne of grace, or a throne of judgment. In coming to the former, hope is discouraged; and to the latter, complaints and charges of injustice and cruelty are excited. Applications for mercy or justice to him, who has already bound up all the destinies of man in his inexorable decrees, are considered as altogether fruitless and vain. The Bible, however, draws a very different picture.

God can, and will, find fault with sinners, and render to the wicked according to their deeds, taking vengeance upon them that obey not the gospel. "Bring those mine enemies that would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me." I called, but they refused; I will therefore laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear cometh. The sinner's transgression and ruin is charged upon himself, and evil is ascribed to its own source. Divine purposes, it has been often repeated, have good exclusively for their object. Moral evil is neither approved nor appointed of God, but is contrary to his very nature. This, I contend, is the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures; is according to godliness; and is calculated to promote a spirit of piety, of devotion, and of general obedience to the will of God.

The opinion that God "foreordained whatsoever comes to pass" is an unjust reflection upon the character of the Deity. The Bible represents Jehovah as laying the iniquities of men upon his well-beloved Son. It pleased the Lord to bruise him, to put him to grief. He was stricken and smitten of God, and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his stripes we are healed. The sufferings of Jesus

were infinite. They cannot be fully described by mortals. But why all these sorrows and sufferings? Can it be conceived that God would give existence by his sovereign decree to the sin for which his well-beloved Son should endure the agonies of Gethsemane and the death of the cross? This would resolve the sufferings of Christ into divine sovereignty, and lead us to inquire, Where is the Father's love to his only begotten Son? Would he give sin a being for the purpose of inflicting its deserts upon the beloved of his soul?

Thus the moral tendency of the opinion that God has decreed whatever comes to pass, is sufficient to exclude it from the Christian's creed. It is opposed to true repentance, genuine humility, Christian watchfulness, confidence, and resignation; is an obstacle to the cultivation of a Christian temper and a holy practice, and clearly derogatory to the glory of God. The belief that all the good experienced by his creatures, angels, and men, in time and in eternity, was fore-appointed, and is graciously effected by the Lord, and that he merely permits their voluntary sin, and consequent ruin, precludes the sinner's complaint, and for ever shuts his mouth; while, at the same time, it promotes the saint's obedience on earth, and will fill his soul with holy wonder and admiration, and his mouth with undissembled praises for ever and ever. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake."

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUDING REMARKS.

Let us now briefly review the points which have been brought under our notice in the preceding pages. The existence of divine decrees, as eternal, sovereign, and absolute, has been proved from the perfections, works, and word of God. The knowledge of Jehovah, it has been shewn, does not exclusively depend upon divine volitions, but is an essential attribute of the divine nature, universal in its extent, and involving a foreknowledge of every event. Many authors maintain that the decrees of God are the exclusive foundation of his foreknowledge, and that, therefore, predestination and prescience are necessarily of equal extent. It has been admitted that the foreknowledge of God's own works must rest upon his own decrees; but that a foreknowledge of all other events, not wrought or produced by him, is the result of his own infinite and absolute perfection. Unless we would limit the all-comprehending mind of Jehovah, we must allow that he could perfectly foresee what events would have taken place, even if he had adopted some other plan in creation and providence. On this principle, many of God's decrees are founded upon his foreknowledge. The absolute nature of divine decrees, and the certainty of divine prescience, are irrelevant to the question at issue. Events absolutely certain to an infinite mind may be matters of mere contingence to man; and, should man be unable to recon-

cile them, it would not prove them contradictory. Prescience and predestination cannot be identified. They differ in point of extent, and also with respect to their influence. That God has given existence to all beings, and that his influence and concurrence are necessary to every action, do not prove the universality of his decrees. A decree to permit sin is a mere subterfuge, a solecism in language, and, strictly speaking, is a decree to do nothing. The decreeing and commanding will of God, described as opposed to each other, is a reflection upon Deity. Scripture texts and examples fail to prove that God has foreordained whatever comes to pass. God could not decree moral evil, because it is contrary to his nature, his will, and his word. It would be to appoint what he hates, and forbids, and what he has determined to punish. The belief that God has decreed all events has an unfavourable influence upon human conduct, if followed to its legitimate consequences. It is opposed to the exercise of Christian repentance, humility, watchfulness, and confidence, and generally to the practice of prescribed duty to God and to man.

Let the reader, after deliberately and impartially weighing the arguments for and against the unlimited extent of divine decrees, judge for himself, which is most consistent with the nature and character of God, with the tenor of his holy word, and with the accountability of man. Whether is the glory of God, the cause of holiness, and the happiness of man, most promoted by the belief or disbelief of this position—"God has unchangeably foreordained whatsoever comes to pass"?

Reader, it is your privilege as well as your duty to search the Holy Scriptures, to prove all things,

and to be fully persuaded in your own mind. The subject discussed in this essay claims pre-eminent attention. It cannot be unimportant, as it lies at the very foundation of theology. It is a kind of key-stone in the arch, on which all the rest depend. It affects at once our views of the divine character, and of our own condition as moral and responsible agents. Our ideas of the equity and reasonableness of the eternal law of God, and of all his moral and positive commands, and the value of the blessings of the everlasting gospel, are also materially affected by the doctrine in question. Can it appear reasonable for Jehovah to command me to love him with all my heart, if he has, by an irreversible decree, previously ordained that I shall be brought under the power of a carnal mind, and remain under it for ever? If a decretal necessity be laid upon man to offend his Maker, it will prevent his gratitude for the exercise of divine forgiveness. Who will feel himself thankful for the pardon of unavoidable sin? Indeed, the opinion is of that nature that it has a bearing, directly or indirectly, upon the whole system of doctrinal, experimental, and practical religion. No serious person, therefore, who has any regard to the glory of the divine character, or the welfare of man, ought to indulge a spirit of indifference, to stand neutral, or remain in a state of indecision upon the point.

Truth seeks no concealment. If the doctrine opposed in this work be a doctrine according to godliness, and clearly revealed in the Scriptures, why should its advocates be afraid to publish it from the pulpit? Are they wiser than the Lord, and ready to impeach him for exposing a doctrine which had better have been kept among his secret things?

Are they ashamed of that which is patronized by divine purity? Surely, those who believe a doctrine to be explicitly revealed in the word of truth, ought to publish and defend it. But there are very few who ever mention it in their public administrations, excepting decided Antinomians; and they should, perhaps, be commended for their awful and terrible consistency, in avowing, without fear or disguise, that God is the principal and the first-moving agent in all that is done under the sun, whether good or evil;—that he decreed all, and works all things after the counsel of his own will. Why should any of its friends shrink back from an open avowal of a doctrine which they believe; and which, in private conversation, they defend? There must be some latent inward conviction that it will not bear the light, or that it is not friendly to the cause of morality, devotion, and holiness.*

* "Whether this doctrine be concealed in the public ministry or not, does not affect the truth or falsehood of the doctrine; those concealing may do wrong in keeping back the truth, but this does not alter the nature of the truth.

But, if they do wrong, who is at liberty to cast the first stone? Do those with more moderate views use no concealment? Some persons think God has chosen some to salvation, and left others to perish;—they often proclaim the former; do they also the latter? They believe these latter persons will perish without miraculous influence exerted on their behalf;—do they tell them so? or do they rather in a degree compromise the matter, and invite them to repentance as though no such miracle was necessary?"

I am no advocate for concealment in either case. Let those who are so vindicate themselves. Truth is truth, whether concealed or published. Only let that which is most prominent in the Bible be most prominent in the public ministry.

The doctrine of eternal predestination and that of human freedom being admitted, it may be affirmed that, though some are

Many persons, who professedly believe the unlimited extent of God's decrees, manifest very little attachment to the doctrine of predestination, though it involves the whole of our salvation. Personal, particular, and eternal election, and the discriminating nature and sovereignty of divine love, as displayed in the salvation of man, are but little relished, and therefore rarely insisted on in public discourses. When they are introduced, it is with a sparing, trembling hand, and generally with a professed design to guard them from abuse. Why so feelingly alive to the supposed evils which may accrue from an avowal of plainly-revealed truth, when the foulest dogma that any of the followers of Calvin have ever avowed, is approved? This is something worse than to strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.

The doctrine of predestination, contemplated in the light of divine revelation, will afford much pleasure to a devout Christian. God, in his own eternal

elected, and God will save them, the rest do not perish but by their own wilful disobedience. Miraculous influence is not necessary to the discharge of duty.

The following are the remarks of a friend:—

"I agree that no part of divine truth ought to lie concealed from a fear of its consequences. For all truth must be consistent with itself, and can be fatal only to error. If, therefore, a principle we believe to be true involve consequences fatal to some other principle previously believed, it proves that either one or the other must be wrong, or that we are labouring under some misconception respecting them, and that there is need for further inquiry on the subject. But an opinion may be true in the abstract, and yet it would be improper to give it a prominent place in the Christian ministry; either because it is not prominent in the word of God, or because it is only remotely connected with the saving truths of the gospel. Those Calvinists, who represent election as the primary truth, appear to me to abandon the mode of preaching contained in the New Testament.

mind, laid a plan to secure his own glory, in the communication of unbounded felicity to man. He knew that rational, responsible, and holy beings, left to themselves, would fall from their purity and happiness, and render themselves liable to eternal misery. He therefore decreed to preserve some angels from sin. These owe their security to his sovereign love. The restoration of any of the fallen sons of Adam to the image and enjoyment of God, is owing to the same cause. In his counsels of old, he remembered man with thoughts of peace, and determined to bestow upon him grace and glory. The elect are, therefore, "saved and called with an holy calling, not according to their works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given them in Christ Jesus before the world began." God saves men because he purposed to save them. His quickening, sanctifying, preserving, and glorifying work is the perfect unfolding of his eternal decree. To the praise of the glory of his grace, and according to the good pleasure of his will, he has predestinated many sons to glory. His purpose, being revealed, lays a foundation for hope. Mountains of brass are not so firm as the decrees of God. The covenant of grace, which contains all our salvation and all our desire, can never be broken or disannulled. The promise of eternal life, which was given before the world began, is in Christ, "Yea, and in him, Amen, unto the glory of God." Israel shall be saved according to an "eternal purpose which was purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." God will never be deceived or disappointed. He will set bounds to moral evil, and wisely, mercifully, and effectually prevent or control and overrule it as he pleases.

The predestination and prescience of Jehovah, in connexion with his love and mercy, render him most worthy of our trust and confidence. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Crosses and trials, afflictions and troubles, may fall to our lot; temptations, enemies, and dangers may surround us; but our heavenly Father knows before hand what will happen, and has made provision for every exigence. That we may not be taken by surprise, he has given us the general instruction, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." God is wise and faithful, and "will not suffer you to be tempted above what ye are able; but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." He knows how, and when, and by what means, "to deliver the godly out of temptation." Being fully aware of the number, power, and designs of our enemies, he can, and will, most effectually counteract their influence, and frustrate their intentions. No being in the universe can go beyond his permission. A dog cannot move his tongue, nor a sparrow fall to the ground, without him. Satan could not touch Job, nor even hurt dumb animals, without divine sufferance. His children, nearer and dearer to him than the apple of his eye, he has determined to preserve and save. He will keep his vineyard night and day: "I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her." To them that love God he will make "all things work together for good." What ground for unshaken confidence! "I will trust,

and not be afraid." He will never leave his chosen to the will of their enemies: "Fear not, I am with thee; be not dismayed, I am thy God." The smith that bloweth the coals to prepare instruments of death, and the waster that wishes to destroy, are perfectly known by the Lord, and he will control and overrule their efforts, and defeat all their evil purposes: "No weapon formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment, thou shalt condemn." The Shepherd of Israel—the Great, the Good, the Chief Shepherd—knows all his sheep; he will watch, feed, and protect them; will give them eternal life, and take care that they shall never perish. Happy is that people whose God is the Lord. To appropriate an interest in his covenant love, in the gracious purposes of his heart; to know that our names are written in the Book of Life, and that his watchful eye is ever over us for good, is sufficient to fill our hearts "with joy unspeakable and full of glory." We may, with composure and confidence, leave all our concerns in his hand, being fully persuaded that "he is too wise to err, and too good to be unkind." "He is in one mind, and who can turn him? And what his soul desireth, even that he doeth; for he performeth the thing that is appointed for me, and many such things are with him."

"Yet I would not be much concern'd,
Nor vainly long to see
The volumes of his deep decrees,
What months are writ for me.

"When he reveals the Book of Life,
O may I read my name
Amongst the chosen of his love,
The followers of the Lamb."—*Watts*.

APPENDIX.

Desirous of eliciting truth, I submitted the MS. of this Essay, in small portions, to the inspection of a gentleman of respectable talents, an independent mind, and entire freedom from bias in favour of the peculiarities of either Calvin or Arminius. He favoured me with his remarks; and has allowed me to lay some of them before the public. It is not necessary to refer to the different parts of the Essay upon which his observations are made, as they relate not to language, but sentiment. They are placed here as they occur on his papers, with such replies as are deemed important.

"How is the freedom of the will affected by the doctrine of the utter depravity of human nature? 'Born in sin, shapen in iniquity,'—what do these expressions mean? They are generally considered by the orthodox as expressions of an early and habitual bias to sin. Can any person, with this early and habitual bias, be said to be free—quite free?"

If a nature, under the strongest bias, an early and habitual bias, whether that bias be to good or evil, is not free, then the Divine nature is not free. I conceive that the disposition, or inclination, does not enter into the question of freedom. Freedom is opposed to force,—confinement,—external restraint or constraint. Therefore he that is born in sin and shapen in iniquity, and has an early and habitual bias to sin, is *free* to act as he pleases,—*quite* free.

"The man, perishing with thirst, is free to refuse the glass of clear cold water which a kind friend is pressing upon him. Yes, very free. Here is the external temptation and the internal inclination. Every sinner has the same. Unite the evil inclination with which the person is born with the Satanic temptation—and is the individual free?"

According to my opinion he is free—very free. Satan cannot force him, and power to follow his own inclination is the very essence of freedom or liberty.

"Are we told the will may, nevertheless, be free? What is the will but the secret internal bias?"

The identity of the will and inclination, or bias, if allowed, does not interfere with the liberty of the individual. The MAN is free.

"Are we not constantly taught from the pulpit, that such is the condition of human nature, from which we can only be rescued by the mighty hand of God, miraculously interposing?"

We are taught that man is a sinner, and God only can save him; but what connexion has this with freedom, or what impediment is it to man's liberty?

"In conclusion, does not—must not the greater inducement prevail? Is the inducement of our *own* providing?"

In many cases, that which ought to be the greater inducement, and, in fact, is so in itself, yet is not conceived to be so by the person, and it does not prevail. The favour of God ought to have had more weight with our first parents than the fruit of any tree. It is of no consequence that the inducements were not of our own providing.

ON THE USE OF TERMS.

"That which will happen, if it will with *certainty* happen, must. Why, then, is the term "*must*" objected to? Is it because it gives the doctrine a terrific appearance? Perhaps it does; but still, a change of one term to another which is synonymous may put on it a more comely appearance, but does not alter the nature of the doctrine. The man is the

same though he has changed his clothes. Does not a certain degree of feverish anxiety to change terms betray an uneasiness as to the truth those terms convey? Observe, Adam's fall was foreseen; if the foresight was correct, the thing 'must' take place. 'No,' says the respondent, 'you should not say so. If you say *must*, you appear to make the fault belong to God; so you must say—Adam's fall was foreseen; if the foresight was correct, the thing will take place.' Where is the difference?"

The terms *must* and *will* convey different ideas; though, at the same time, the certainty of the event is not at all affected.

"Further, 'the fall,' say some, 'was not decreed; but it was foreseen.' How was it foreseen? The strength of the temptation was known; the power of resistance was known; it was known that *quantum* of temptation would prevail. Had it been otherwise, the temptation must have been weaker, or a change must have taken place in the person acted upon."

Its being foreknown had no influence upon the event. The power of resistance given, and what might have been given, was known; and what then?

"I do not imagine man was seduced by the fruit. Adam was not deceived: 'The woman gave unto her husband, and he did eat.' If the woman had been less lovely in the eyes of Adam, she would not have prevailed; he would, perhaps, have left her to perish alone in her transgression; but, amiable as she was in his eyes, he determined to share her fate. See this subject more at large in Milton's Paradise Lost. Could he have made her less amiable? Did not her qualifications and beauties command his admiration? Had he acted otherwise, would they both have been precisely the same agents?" *

He determined to share, that is, he *chose*, he *resolved*; but, on your principle, he had no choice. He *was* determined by something out of himself,—effectually overcome by inducements not of his providing. "I am conscious that some actions are in my power, and that others are not; that when I neglect to do what I ought to do, and can do, I deserve to be punished; and that, when I act necessarily, or upon unavoid-

able and irresistible compulsion, I deserve neither punishment nor blame."*

"The mode of reasoning upon consequences may be well admitted when the subject does not admit of better proof; and often there is no other way to come at truth. For instance, A. was found murdered; B. was found near him, with a sword, and property which was known to be A.'s was found upon him. Consequently I conclude that A. was killed by B.; and if I refuse this method of arriving at a conclusion, no other method remains. But if I shew a man a square or a circle, I must prove it by the thing itself; and, having proved it, I cannot be thrown back by any argument drawn from the doctrine of consequences, because demonstration is better than uncertain inferential proof."

It is allowed that demonstration is better than inferential reasoning. But all truth does not admit of mathematical proof. How will any man prove the existence and perfections of God without having direct reference to the doctrine of consequences? It is from his works we infer his being, (Psalm xix., Rom. i. 19, 20,) and from the judgments of his hand, (Psalm lviii. 11.) Our feelings are incapable of proof direct, yet they are as evident to the subject as our own existence.

"The Necessarian says, 'The agent is not free, because the greater inducement must bias his choice.' Now let the respondent say, is this position true or false? Let him not say, if it is true, the doctrine of man's accountability is destroyed; but let him say whether it is true or not. There will be no impropriety in an ulterior examination of this sort, if found necessary; but, first of all, let the main point be discussed."

"*The agent is not free.*" This, in the sense advanced, I deny. I say it is false; unless, indeed, the Necessarian means by freedom, independency of God, or a freedom of acting whether God will or not. For this no one will contend. To be free, according to some, is to be mere stocks and stones, moving only as we are moved under a foreign impulse, and governed by the doctrine of inducements, as heavy bodies are by the

* Beattie on Truth, pp. 23, 24. Edition 1824.

laws of gravitation. I refer to the definition of freedom, and then declare that the Necessarian may look to consequences, for not only is the accountability, but the very nature, of man denied or destroyed upon his system.

ON THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF NECESSITY.

"When Priestley, Edwards, and others speak of six different kinds of necessity, I am led to wonder whether they are indeed endeavouring to simplify and disentangle the subject, or trying to make it difficult,—repeating the service in Latin, that the commoners may not understand. '*Concomitant* and *antecedent* necessity,'—is this clearing the subject, or darkening counsel by words without knowledge? 'Whatever maketh manifest is light.' Is this intended to make manifest? or is it like the scuttle-fish, which thickens the water to elude pursuit?"

The distinction of the different kinds of necessity may perhaps be of use among the learned; but, for my own part, I have never derived much advantage from it. Yet I cannot think that such men as President Edwards meant to make the water muddy in order to elude pursuit.

"All kinds of necessity may be dismissed from this subject except the necessity of yielding to the greatest inducement. Force is out of the question. Bread is before a hungry man; he must of necessity eat. Why? does any one use force—violently open his mouth, and thrust the bread into it? No; but yet he *must* eat: his appetite is keen, the bread is tempting,—there is no reason for him to resist the inducement;—he yields, he eats. 'Ay, but,' says one, 'perhaps he does not eat.' Why then he has a still stronger inducement to resist; and he yields to the stronger inducement."

"The necessity of yielding to the greatest inducement." You allow the hungry man may or may not eat. Then he is free. "No," you say, "he yields to a stronger inducement." What then? Why? You allow he has a choice, and is governed, not by the stronger inducement, but by that which *appears* so to him at the time, and which might have appeared otherwise, had he employed his power of reflection. Be it re-

membered, however, that a necessity to eat, is not a necessity to sin.

ON THE ORIGIN OF EVIL.

"The Essay opposes the idea of God's having decreed evil, because it is conceived such a system makes God the author of sin. *Query*—Is the difference very great between making God the author of sin, and the author of an angel or a man who is the author of sin? Does not God know the remote consequences as well as the immediate consequences of his own work? And, if any one should arise hardy enough to say to the Potter, 'What doest thou?' might he not, with the same propriety, charge upon him the evil of the one as the other?"

Admitting that God made man, and that by man sin came into the world, I can by no means admit that sin is the immediate consequence of God's own work. Does it follow that, because the mechanic has made a razor, or a knife, that he is the author of all the mischief that may be done by the one or the other? No one ever thinks of charging the consequence upon the maker.

"We must be very careful in our anxiety to avoid making God the author of evil, of not setting up two deities, or powers, as the ancients did. The Persians are said to believe in this; and it is supposed by some that Isaiah (xlv. 7) alludes to this, when he declares, or represents the Lord as saying, 'I have done all these things; darkness as well as light is my creating.'"

You fear that, by denying God to be the author of sin, we shall be in danger "of setting up two deities;" but, were we to admit him the author of sin, we should have no God. Isaiah (xlv. 7) refers, not to moral darkness or evil, but to natural evil—as famine, pestilence; in short, adversity generally.

"I think the Essay, on which the foregoing remarks are made, is as good an attempt to reconcile election with man's accountability as ever I have read; but might not the subject be left, acknowledging the difficulty, thus:—God, as a sovereign, has called some persons, by his irresistible power, to repent-

ance, and subsequent happiness;—those, who have not the power exercised upon them, will perish. These latter persons, in the Scriptures, are, nevertheless, said to be accountable to God for their conduct, i.e. for not repenting, and not choosing happiness. If I see all these things clearly revealed, may I not hold them, acknowledging the difficulty which attends uniting them?"

You may hold the sentiment, and acknowledge the difficulty; but it does not follow that therefore the difficulty is insurmountable, or that I or you should not seek a satisfactory conclusion.

ESSAY II.

ON THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST.

THE doctrines of the everlasting gospel have a mutual and inseparable connexion with each other. They may be distinguished, but not separated. They form one chain of divine truth, without one defective or unnecessary link. To make any addition, or to diminish from them, would cast a reflection on the wisdom and goodness of God. The system of revealed truth, as "the law of the Lord, is perfect." To disturb any part disorganizes the whole. As a respectable writer has remarked, "The doctrines of divine revelation, though not delivered to us in a systematic form, do, nevertheless, constitute a very sublime and beautiful system, the several truths of which are intimately connected and mutually dependent on each other, so that the relinquishment of one important doctrine of the divine word involves the surrender of a second. The unity broken in one part, renders every part insecure,—as the removal of one step from a flight of geometrical stairs would endanger the entire fabric by invading the principle on which it is constructed." There are, however, some doctrines which seem of greater importance than others. They are the very life of the rest. The doctrine of *the Atonement*, for instance, is of this description. It is a truth which lies at the very foundation of the

Christian system. Take this away, and the entire superstructure of evangelical truth falls to the ground. To renounce the doctrine of the Atonement or Reconciliation by the cross of Christ, is virtually to relinquish the whole scheme of man's salvation; for when that, and all that depends upon it, is discarded, the gospel is not merely mutilated, but annihilated. Nothing is then left which can characterize it as glad tidings. Redemption through the blood of Christ, like the keystone of the arch, is radically and fundamentally essential to the gospel of Christ.

The necessity of redemption, in order to man's restoration to the image and favour of God, appears in every part of the inspired word. Man can neither be pardoned nor justified, and, consequently, not sanctified and glorified, unless he is first redeemed. Without redemption, God cannot clear the guilty, nor acquit the wicked. Man's awful apostacy from Jehovah, the guilt he has contracted, his absolute inability to give to his Creator a satisfaction for his sins, and his total aversion to do it, even supposing he were able, in conjunction with the unspotted holiness and inflexible justice of Deity, and the immutable requisitions and holy sanctions of the divine law, render an atonement absolutely necessary, in order to the everlasting salvation of the soul of man.

With a deep conviction, then, of the importance and necessity of the atonement, I enter upon this discussion with diffidence. I shall consider the subject under three divisions:—

I.—The nature of the Atonement or Redemption.

II.—The extent of this Atonement,—whether it be special or general.

III.—The consistency of particular Redemption with the universal invitations of the Scriptures, and with the increased guilt and misery of those "that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In the prosecution of the proposed plan, I most earnestly pray that I may not be suffered to "pervert the gospel," nor to darken counsel by words without knowledge; but may receive Divine assistance to state and defend "the truth as it is in Jesus."

PART I.

ON THE NATURE OF THE ATONEMENT OR REDEMPTION.

CHAPTER I.

DEFINITION OF TERMS.—THE IMPORT OF REDEMPTION.

A disagreement on points of doctrine frequently originates in a misunderstanding of words; I shall, therefore, explain some of the terms which will be found in the following pages.

SECTION I.

Definition of Terms.

Atonement always denotes an amends or satisfaction for the neglect of some duty, or the commission of some fault; which, if complete, should content the injured party, so that he should demand nothing more of the offender. In some cases, between man

and man, the offender may make an atonement himself. For instance, in neglected labour, he may perform an extra portion, at another time, which shall be fully equivalent to what he had neglected, and so be deemed a complete compensation to his injured employer. But if the person owed all he could perform for perpetuity, then he cannot atone for any neglect, for this very obvious reason,—all his services are absolutely and antecedently due. Amends for an injury or fault cannot possibly be made by that which is previously due on other grounds, and the neglect of which would constitute another injury. In such cases, if an atonement is made at all, it must be by a third person; that is, by one who is not under obligations for himself to render the services by which the atonement is made. That which is due for himself cannot be accepted as a satisfaction for an offender. Hence it is clear that the sinner can never make an atonement for his omissions of duty, and transgressions of the law of Jehovah. An atonement made, supposes the offender to be accepted. His transgression is forgiven, and his sin is covered. To atone, farther signifies, to cover, hide, and conceal. The offences of those for whom the atonement of Christ is made, are covered and hid, and are no more to be found. Hence atonement and propitiation for sin are synonymous terms.* The latter is that which satisfies law and justice, and covers all our transgressions and guilt, as the mercy-seat covered and concealed the tables of the law.

To expiate, signifies to cleanse from defilement, in addition to the removal of guilt, or amends for

* Rom. iii. 25, v. 11; 1 John ii. 2.

the fault.* Satisfaction must be made in such a manner as eventually to wash away the stain as well as to remove the guilt of the transgressor.

A *ransom* is the price paid for the redemption or deliverance of a slave or a captive.† "Deliver him from going into the pit; I have found a ransom."‡ "A man's riches are the ransom of his life."§ The obedience of Christ unto death, is the ransom or price paid to Divine justice for the deliverance of the people.‖ But the word *ransom*, in many places, includes also the actual rescue of the object, by the exertion of power.¶ To ransom, in the fullest sense of the word, is to buy, or to buy back, by paying a price, and to apprehend and secure that which is bought.**

To *redeem* is nearly of the same import as to ransom, but used more promiscuously to include both a price paid and a deliverance effected. The price paid lays a foundation for the righteous exertion of power in taking possession of the object for which the price was laid down.†† The price paid for man's redemption was not gold and silver, but the precious blood of the Son of God.‡‡ Hence we are bought with a price, and are not our own; but, as redeemed from the earth to God, we are under obligation to glorify him with our bodies and our souls.§§ True Christians are, therefore, a purchased possession, a peculiar (or purchased) people.‖‖ The price paid secures the possession.

* Num. xxxv. 33. † Exod. xxi. 30. ‡ Job xxxiii. 24.
§ Prov. xiii. 8. ‖ Matt. xx. 28.
¶ Jer. xxxi. 11; Hosea xiii. 14. ** Isa. xxxv. 10.
†† Deut. vii. 5, xxxii. 6; Titus ii. 14; Luke i. 68.
‡‡ Pet. i. 19. §§ 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20; Rev. xiv. 4
‖‖ Eph. i. 14; 1 Peter ii. 9.

Christ is made of God redemption, to deliver them from the hand of their enemies. Those who have redemption in his blood shall be redeemed from this present evil world, from the love, power, being, and consequences of sin, Satan, and the grave.* On this ground Christ is repeatedly called the Redeemer, both in the Old Testament and in the New. The Jewish law of redemption may serve, in many particulars, to illustrate and expound the nature of redemption by Jesus Christ.

Reconciliation is another term frequently employed in reference to the doctrine of redemption. It relates to some previous disagreement, or quarrel, between two or more parties. To reconcile, is, by a proper method, to put an end to the dispute, without injury to the offended or suffering party. The disagreement here is between the sinner and the Almighty. The offence is all on one side. God has not quarrelled with man, but man with him. Hence Deity does not need reconciling to the offender, but the offender to Deity. Reconciliation is virtual and actual. The former was accomplished by Christ, when he gave his life a ransom; and the latter is effected by the Spirit of Christ, in the regeneration and sanctification of the soul. "If when we were enemies we were (virtually) reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being (actually) reconciled, we shall be saved by his life," of intercession and government.† "God was in Christ, reconciling, virtually, the world unto himself," not himself to the world, "and hath committed" to his ministers "the word of reconciliation," who "therefore beseech sinners to be" actually "reconciled to God."‡

* Eph. i. 7; Gal. i. 4, &c. † Rom. v. 10.
‡ 2 Cor. v. 18—21.

The epithets usually connected with these words, as general, universal, particular, limited, and the phrase, *dying for*, &c., &c., will be explained in the second Part of this Essay.

The words, to atone—expiate—ransom—redeem, and reconcile, appear to amalgamate, and only to express the same idea, in different points of view. To atone and expiate, signify to cover the guilt and wash away the stain; to ransom and redeem, generally mean to pay a price for, and to deliver the thing or object purchased; and to reconcile, is to put an end to the quarrel, by slaying the enmity. Jesus is said to reconcile both Jew and Gentile "unto God, in one body, by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby." He reconciles man to God, and man to man.

The words, *expiate*, *ransom*, and *reconcile*, are generally employed strictly in the sense now given; but to atone and to redeem, are used indiscriminately, without regard to the minute distinction which might have been observed. For Christ to die for all mankind, to make an atonement for all, and to redeem all, are employed as phrases expressive of the same idea. The word *atonement* occurs frequently in the writings of Moses, but not at all, I believe, in the Psalms, or in the Prophets, and only once in the New Testament, where it refers to the effects of the death of Christ, as received by the believer. As the word redeem, and its derivatives, are of more frequent occurrence in the New Testament, as connected with the Saviour's death, they are more frequently used in these pages.

SECTION II.

The import of Atonement or Redemption.

The scripture doctrine of the Atonement, or Redemption, implies the sin and the misery of man, and his release and deliverance, in a way just to all parties concerned. Had man never sinned, redemption had been unnecessary, The angels who have kept their first estate, though elected, are not redeemed. But our first father sinned by transgressing the law, and became justly obnoxious to God's holy displeasure. That all mankind were involved with Adam in the awful consequences of his fall, is a fact most clearly and abundantly taught us in the Holy Scriptures. Human nature was corrupted in the fountain; and hence all the streams have been impure. I am not ignorant that different opinions are entertained, in reference to the consequences of Adam's sin upon his posterity; both respecting the imputation of the guilt of his sin, and of the communication of moral impurity. These questions I now wave, and proceed upon matters of fact. Adam was spared, and begat a son in his own likeness. His descendants have ever been shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin.

Men are born unclean or unholy, and unless they become the subjects of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, they remain in a state of alienation from God, living "according to the course of this world, serving divers lusts and pleasures;" their minds being at enmity to God, and their hearts deceitful and desperately wicked. Hence the Apostle "proved that Jew and Gentile were both under sin;" that "there is none righteous—no, not one;" and that "all have sinned, and come short of the

glory of God." These facts being established beyond contradiction, the law denounces its heavy curses against every transgressor. "For we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world become guilty before God." "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law, to do them." Man being under the curse, by reason of his guilt, and enslaved by sin and Satan, by reason of his internal depravity, must perish for ever, unless he is redeemed by one who is able to satisfy the claims of offended justice, and rescue him from the thraldom and bondage in which he is held. Man himself can neither do the one nor the other. The redemption of the soul is precious, but it must cease, and the soul must perish for ever, for any thing that a creature can do to effect its deliverance. However, Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son to rescue myriads of our fallen race from wretchedness and misery, and bring them to the enjoyment of himself in everlasting glory. For "the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." He removes our guilt by his atoning blood, and effects our emancipation by regenerating grace. By the former he redeems us from the curse of the law, and by the latter, he redeems us from all iniquity, and purifies us unto himself, a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

* A question might here arise, respecting the possibility of sin being pardoned without an atonement. I consider such a scheme, however, to be entirely incompatible with the divine nature. The nature of sin, of the law, and of divine justice, dic-

SECTION III.

Deliverance effected by a price paid for Redemption.

To redeem sinners, is to effect their righteous deliverance, by paying a ransom or price for them. In this sense persons redeem the articles they have pledged, by paying an equivalent to have them re-

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tates the contrary. Whatever God might have done, the fact is plain, that he hath not pardoned sin without a price paid, and an atonement made. And who has seen the depths of all the possibilities of the divine nature, so as to warrant him to affirm that this was possible? I conceive that vindicative justice is natural and essential to God, and, therefore, that sin must be punished, and God must have satisfaction rendered, as the ground on which pardon can be dispensed. The scripture does not ascribe the punishment of sin to the mere will or decree of God; but to the justice, the righteousness, and the holiness of his nature. Sinners suffer because Jehovah is righteous. Did Deity punish sin merely from his will, then it is like the creation of the world, or the gift of rain,—an act of divine sovereignty, and not a necessary emanation of divine justice. How is it, then, that men have implanted in them such a dread of the consequences of sin? Besides, how can punishment be the desert of sin, if God could have forgiven it without a ransom? They that do such things are worthy of death. But why worthy? I should say sin is a dishonour to God, and therefore deserves punishment. To suppose that the sufferings of Christ for the sins of the people were unnecessary, and that sin might have been forgiven without them, seems to reflect upon all the attributes of God, and especially upon his wisdom and his love. Why should Jesus suffer, agonize, and die? Why be covered with reproach, scorn, and ignominy? Why be made a curse, if God could have saved his people in some other way? The infinite perfection and excellency of God must always take the best and most excellent way in all his works; and, therefore, as he has taken this method in treating his only begotten, his well-beloved Son, to make his soul an offering for sin, we may safely conclude that this was the fittest, wisest, best, and only way for the salvation of sinners, consistent with the perfections of the divine nature, the honour of Jehovah's government, and the purity and immutability of his eternal law.

stored. This may be done by another person duly authorized, and possessing the proper or required credentials. This figure falls far short of a full representation of the subject, yet it may serve, in part, to illustrate the redemption Christ has effected. He paid a price for his people, even his own most precious blood. Being bought with a price, they are called the ransomed and the redeemed of the Lord.* This redemption was typified and represented in the Old Testament, by the redemption-money paid for the first-born of Israel, and by the redemption of houses, fields, cattle, &c.†

On the ground of the ransom paid by Christ, the church is said to be a purchased possession; redeemed, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot. The Apostle of the Gentiles charges the elders at Ephesus, "to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." He exhorts the believers at Corinth to purity, from the consideration that they are not their own. "Ye are," says he, "bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." When the people of Israel were numbered, they were required to "give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord, that there might be no plague among them."‡ This ransom, like that which Jesus

* Isa. xxxv. 10, li. 11.

† See Lev. xxv., xxvii. 20; Num. xviii. 15—17, 30; Ex. xi. 16.

‡ This text, and others, imply that the Redeemer paid the same price for one as for another, whether they were greater or less sinners. And, indeed, this is often the case among men. Capital punishments take away the life, and can take away no more, whether the criminal be guilty of twenty murders, or only of one. There are no degrees in death. There may be different ways of inflicting it, but the thing, in itself, is the same.

has given, was the same for one as for another. No distinction of price was made between the poor and the rich. "The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than half a shekel, when they give an offering unto the Lord, to make an atonement for their souls."* This appointment, no doubt, teaches the necessity of an atonement. God can by no means dispense pardon to the guily, but on the ground of satisfaction made. This satisfaction could not be made by any creature, man or angel. No man, however rich, can by any means redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him. The redemption of the soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever if not undertaken and accomplished by the Lord. He only can deliver "from the wrath to come." Jesus has given "himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."

The price paid was not gold or silver, not thousands of rams, nor rivers of oil. It was not effected as the deliverance of Israel was, when God gave Egypt for their ransom—Ethiopia and Seba for them. In *this* case, Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. Life was forfeited, and life must be sacrificed to make an atonement, and it must be a life, too, equal in value to the lives of all who are to be relieved or delivered by the price. Hence the blood of bulls, and of goats, and the cattle upon a thousand hills, could never satisfy the claims of Divine justice, or repair the honours of a broken law. These sacrifices were tried, but they could not take away sin, nor make the offerers perfect; for then would they not have ceased to be offered. But all of them being inefficient, the Redeemer

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* Exod. xxx. 12—15.

said, "Lo! I come to do thy will, O God. By the which will we are sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Jesus laid down his life for the sheep,—gave it a voluntary sacrifice, as a ransom for them. "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." Here is a life of infinite value, of more value than the lives of all the human race, and of all the angels in heaven, and this life given, freely given, as a ransom price for the lives of those for whom he suffered. Jesus gave his body to be broken for us, he gave his flesh for the life of the world, and his blood to be shed for many, for the remission of sins. He poured out his soul unto death, and made it an offering for sin; "he loved the church, and gave himself for it." He loved me," says Paul, "and gave himself for me." He gave body for body, flesh for flesh, soul for soul, life for life, on the behalf of his people. Thus he bought the church with his own most precious blood. "The great God and our Saviour" redeemed his people from the curse of the law, that he might "purify them unto himself, a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

This ransom price includes the Redeemer's obedience as well as his sufferings. The lamb to be offered must be without blemish and without spot. Had there been any imperfection, or want of purity, in his nature or his life, his sufferings would not have been available, nor accepted as satisfactory in the behalf of sinners. The high priest under the law, being a sinner in common with the people, offered for himself as well as for the people; but

Jesus was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. He did no sin, neither was "guile found in his mouth." His whole nature was holy, and his whole life blamelessly perfect. It is affirmed of him, that he "knew no sin." He fulfilled the law, both in the letter and the spirit of it. This was required in order to the justification of man in the sight of God. For the moral law, emanating from the very perfections and nature of God, is, like its Author, unchangeable. It cannot be repealed or relaxed. It requires perfect obedience, or condemns the transgressor. "Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." Without a perfect and unsinning obedience to this law, no flesh can be justified. It was, therefore, absolutely necessary that Jesus should fulfil this law, both to render his sufferings valid, that he might, having no sin of his own, be a proper substitute for his people, and that he might work out a righteousness every way sufficient to be the ground of their justification in the sight of God. Thus Jesus is "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." "He is the Lord, our righteousness," and we are "made the righteousness of God in him." To have an interest in this righteousness was the object of the apostle's most ardent desire and pursuit. "That I may win Christ and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." The obedience of Jesus reached to every commandment of the law, and extended the whole length of every precept with respect both to the principle and the obedience required. His motive and his ends were holy. His

nature was perfectly pure, without blemish; and his life holy, without spot. He did no sin, he knew no sin. He magnified the law, and made it honourable, and is, therefore, made the righteousness of God to his people. He fulfilled all righteousness. Though the law originally required no more of holy angels and men, in order to their acceptance with God, than perfect conformity to its commands, yet, when it has been transgressed by them, it requires the execution of its curse. The penalty must be inflicted; the sinner must suffer, or the honour and glory of the law are sullied. If the law can be transgressed with impunity, encouragement will be given to crime. But this is not the case. Sin shall not go unpunished. God "is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked." He will by no means clear the guilty. Though it is here said that he *will* not acquit the wicked—that he *will* not clear the guilty,—yet the punishment of sin is not to be considered as an arbitrary act, arising solely from the will of the Lawgiver. The law itself is not to be considered as an enactment springing from the sovereign will of the Legislator. In that case, it might have been different, had he been pleased to make it so. But it is rather to be viewed as arising from the nature of God, and of creatures, and from the relations subsisting between him and them, and the relations they bear to one another. Viewed in this light, the law is natural, necessary, and eternal. It is, like its Author, immutable in its nature, demands, and sanctions. God had a choice whether he would create such a being as man; but, upon the supposition of his existence, there could be no choice whether man should be under obligation to

love and obey his Creator, and to love his fellow men. Nor, upon the supposition of his transgressing the law, could it be matter of choice whether he should suffer, or be liable to punishment. Obligation to obedience, and to suffering in case of disobedience, are without the range of divine sovereignty. It is as impossible to cancel the obligation as to change the divine nature. The law flows as naturally from the nature of God and man as light from the sun. Jehovah could as soon deny himself as reverse his law. On this principle, it follows that the sinner must suffer, unless, indeed, a surety can be found able and willing to stand in his place. If the sinner himself could have found a substitute, Jehovah was not under obligation to accept him. To accept a surety is an act of free and undeserved favour, originating in the sovereign will of Jehovah. But the sinner could never have found one. Deity himself provided a lamb for sacrifice. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Hence "redemption through his blood, and forgiveness of sins, are according to the riches of his grace." We are "justified freely by his grace," and yet it is "through the redemption there is in Christ Jesus." This is the glory of the scheme. While men are saved, neither law nor justice suffers, and the love of Jehovah shines forth with unutterable splendour. In this plan "mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace embrace each other." But this could not possibly have been effected in any other way than through the incarnation, obedience,

and sufferings of the Son of God. "For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Here the necessity of the Mediator's sufferings, in order to the salvation of his people, is plainly asserted. Without bloodshedding there could be no remission of sin; and the blood of bulls and of goats, or of any mere creature, could not take away sin: then said the Saviour, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." This he did by the offering of his body once for all.* And by this "one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."

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* Jesus his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree. A deceased author says that Jesus "Bore the whole of our sins, and suffered all that they who had committed them deserved to endure. What else, indeed, can be meant by *bearing our sins?*"—(Mann on the Atonement.)

"We are to know that Christ, in some respects, did or suffered the very same that we should have done in other respects, or that which is equivalent. As, for example, it was necessary that Christ should suffer death, and the same kind of death, viz. a cursed death for us. Therefore that position, that one drop of Christ's blood was sufficient to redeem the world, is not to be admitted. Justice required death, and a cursed death; therefore the same, not a drop of blood, but death itself must be."—(Burgess on Justification, Part ii. p. 74. 1654.)

Is the sentiment avowed by these authors tenable? Does it not proceed upon the principle that the measure of the Saviour's sufferings was proportioned to the number of the sins of the sinners for whom he died? The Redeemer died for us. The same penalty was attached to the transgression of one individual, and no more than death could have been inflicted had as many worlds been redeemed as there are individuals.

CHAPTER II.

THE SUBSTITUTION OF CHRIST.

That Jesus Christ might, by his sufferings and death, pay a ransom for the deliverance of his people, it was requisite that he should become their substitute, and stand in their place, in order that what he did might so become theirs as to be imputed to their account. Where there is no relation or connexion between the parties, no benefits or injuries can be transferred. Adam's disobedience affects us on account both of the natural and federal relation he sustained or bore to us. As we were seminally in him, we derive from him a polluted nature; and, as he was our representative and federal head, we are all involved in the consequences of his disobedience. The sin of angels did not, in this sense, affect man, nor the sin of man affect angels, because there was no natural or federal relationship between them. If there had been another pair of human beings created by the Lord separate from Adam and Eve, and no stipulated relation between them and Adam, Adam's fall could not have affected or injured them in the way it has injured his posterity. So with respect to Jesus Christ; his obedience and death can only benefit us in consequence of his having become our substitute, and voluntarily forming a near and intimate relationship to us. This relationship between him and us was not natural, but the fruit of his own sovereign love. The sub-

stitution of the Son of God to be the Saviour of the guilty, and the constitution of his person to qualify him for a successful performance of his mediation between God and man, are the substance, the essence, the glory, and the grandeur of the gospel scheme.

It is not intended, in this Essay, to treat very largely either on the Substitution of Christ, or of the Constitution of his person, but the introduction of them, at some length, appears necessary in discussing the subject of human redemption.

SECTION I.

Christ the Substitute of his People.

The system of divine truth would indeed appear poor and meagre, if divested of the glorious doctrines of the substitution and satisfaction of Christ. "The adversaries of these truths," as one says, "rob the gospel of all its value, and remove all the substantial food on which a soul should live for eternity."

By *substitution*, is meant the placing or putting one person or thing in the room of another. It, therefore, naturally falls to the lot of the substitute to do or suffer, to receive or enjoy, whatever would have fallen to the lot of the individual whose substitute he is. The same obedience shall be required from him, or the same penalties exacted, or the same blessings and favours conferred upon him. In this relation, therefore, of a substitute, we view the Redeemer in his obedience unto death. This doctrine is witnessed both by the law and the prophets. The law required animals to be presented

on the altar of God as victims, not on their own account, but as substitutes for the guilty. But these were so only as types of Jesus. They could not take away sin, remove the curse of a broken law, nor open the gates of the Paradise of God. They only pointed out the necessity of an atonement, and prefigured what was to be accomplished by the Lamb of God, who should appear once in the end of the world, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And the prophets declare, as with one voice, that Messiah shall be cut off, but not for himself. "He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." The Lord laid upon him the iniquity of us all, and though he had personally done no violence, neither was deceit or guile found in his mouth, yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to put him to grief. For the transgression of my people was he stricken. The apostles, in perfect accordance with Moses and the prophets, testify that "himself bare our sins in his own body on the tree;" that "he was made sin for us;" that "he died for our sins, according to the Scriptures;" that "he suffered, the just for the unjust;" that "he died for the ungodly;" that "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." The particle *for*, in these texts, directly and emphatically expresses the doctrine of the substitution of Christ in the sinner's place. He died not *for* himself, he had no sin, he knew no sin, and it is impossible to justify the providence of God, in the permission of his death, on any principle but that of his being the substitute of the guilty. It is only in this light that it can be said, "he became *obedient* to death, even the death of the cross."

"He laid down his life for the sheep," in obedience to the commandment he received from his Father.

SECTION II.

The Substitution of Christ further explained.

IT appears, indeed, peculiarly striking, that the innocent should suffer for the guilty. It is a case of rare occurrence, and beyond the line of strict justice to require it, yet not contrary to it, when all parties concerned are agreed and satisfied. We have instances of one man becoming surety for another in cases of pecuniary transactions, and it may be a matter of indifference to the creditor who pays the debt, provided that it is discharged. Sins are debts, and punishment is their reward.* But is it not amazing that the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, should subject himself to the sad effects of man's wilful disobedience to God?

The substitution of Christ must be an act of pure grace. Jehovah was under no obligation to find a substitute for the sinner, nor even to accept a substitute, if found by the sinner himself. If the transgressor is not compelled to suffer in his own person what is due to his crimes, he must be wholly indebted to free grace. The sinner, however, could never have provided a substitute able and willing to suffer in his stead. This was impossible. No creature, man or angel, could have satisfied the claims of law and justice, on the behalf of a sinner, even if he had been willing to take his place. The

* Matt. vi. 20; Luke vii. 41.

eternal punishment of the creature would not have made any atonement, and therefore could never have been available for the guilty. God alone could find a ransom or a substitute to suffer in the sinner's stead. This must, therefore, on his part, be an act of sovereign favour. And grace must appear in the willingness of the substitute himself; for if not willing he could not be acceptable. Under no previous obligation to undertake the work, he must come voluntarily forward of his own accord.

"God was not bound to accept of a surety in our stead. He might have executed the threatening upon our own persons. There could be no necessity, either natural or moral, obliging him to receive a satisfaction from another: so in this respect it was an act of grace to accept of Christ's sufferings for us. It was wholly of God's favour that Christ was fore-ordained to be our Mediator."*

To render any act of substitution available, it must be approved by the supreme authority, otherwise it cannot be accepted. On this ground we have every assurance that the appointment of Christ to die for the guilty resulted from the bosom of the Lawgiver. He himself devised the wonderful expedient. When sinners were lost, ruined, and self-destroyed, and every way unable to devise or execute a plan for their own recovery, God found a ransom, and laid help on one mighty to save. Hence the scheme has his highest approbation. He calls upon all the ends of the earth to look unto Jesus, and be saved. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth." "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;

* Burgess on Justification, Part ii. p. 94. London 1654.

hear ye him." Jesus has, on the behalf of sinful men, magnified the law, and made it honourable; and God is well pleased for his righteousness' sake.

The resurrection, the ascension, and session of Christ at the Father's right hand, the prevalence of his intercession, and the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit for the conversion and sanctification of men, are indubitable proofs of the approval of this plan by the eternal Judge.

This substitution, to be acceptable, must be voluntary on the part of the substitute. This was pre-eminently the case with respect to Jesus Christ. His engagement, and his subsequent obedience, sufferings, and death, were free and unconstrained. "Lo, I come. I delight to do thy will, O God." "I have a baptism to be baptized with," referring to his sufferings and death, "and how am I straitened until it be accomplished." "No man taketh away my life from me; I lay it down of myself." "The good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." What he now did voluntarily, he, with all the prospect before him, freely and voluntarily engaged to do. Moreover, to render the substitute duly fit to undertake the redemption of others, he must not be chargeable with any crime of his own. He who is himself insolvent is not a proper person to become surety for another. Law and justice would not accept his security. All men, on this ground, are absolutely disqualified to undertake this work of mediation between God and man. The redemption of the soul, however precious, must cease for ever, if relief come not from some other quarter. For all flesh has corrupted its way. Every mouth is stopped, and the whole world is guilty before God. "No man can by any means redeem his brother, or

give to God a ransom for him." Here, then, appears the wisdom, as well as the love of God: when he saw that there was no man able or willing to undertake the cause, and wondered that there was no intercessor, none to help, none to uphold, that then his own arm brought salvation He found and accepted a surety, even his own Son, Jesus Christ, the righteous. He was perfectly holy, harmless, and undefiled; such a substitute as we needed, and as God could accept. In him human nature was free from the taint of sin. He was that holy thing born of the Virgin. He was without blemish in his nature, and without spot in his life. He was thus qualified to undertake the work of mediation, and to answer all the demands of law and justice, on the behalf of those whom he represented. He presented to the law a perfect righteousness, and to justice a perfect sacrifice. He substituted himself a victim to the claims of justice, and bore the sins of his own people in his own body on the tree.

He that becomes a substitute for another should highly approve the law which he undertakes to honour and magnify. It is incumbent on him, not only to respect it himself, but to take means to make those regard it also whose interests he espouses. Hence he should engage for their repentance and reformation. In this respect, Jesus has given the most unequivocal proofs of his superlative regard to the law, and he rescues the people in such a way as to secure their affectionate regard and practical conformity to it. He has yielded perfect obedience to all its commands, and upon the cross has proved that he loved the law above life itself. He has practically vindicated the purity, goodness, and reasonableness of the re-

quirements of God. The glory of the Divine government was deeply concerned in maintaining its unsullied reputation. The Redeemer, therefore, not only testified his delight in it, and maintained the honour of Jehovah's throne, by yielding unconstrained obedience to every precept, and in bearing its awful penalty, drinking the very last drop of the cup of his Father's indignation, but also in making provision that all the ransomed of the Lord shall delight in the law of God after the inner man. They are brought to renounce sin, and to repent of it; to approve the law, and justify its severest curses. There is no compromise of the honours of the law, nor any reflection upon Jehovah's government; but, on the contrary, the glory of both is secured and enhanced in time, and through eternity, by the doctrine of the Saviour's substitution.

As this act should be voluntary on the part of the substitute, so it should be deliberate, and not the effect of a momentary impulse. It is a matter of that importance, and involves consequences so momentous, that it requires the most profound and serious consideration. But the Redeemer did not engage without having most maturely weighed the whole matter. He was acquainted from eternity with all that could possibly result from the engagement. He knew what obedience he had to perform, what sufferings he had to undergo, and had the clearest view of the demerit of sin, the justice of God, and the malice of men and of devils, and of all the ignominy, reproach, and contempt that would be thrown upon him, if he undertook to be the substitute of sinners. The whole scene of his sufferings he foreknew, too, from eternity. He had sufficiently revolved the matter over in his

mind. Yet, in the fullest prospect of all he had to perform and endure, he engaged in the work, and, having undertaken it, "he was not rebellious, neither turned away back; he gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; he hid not his face from shame and spitting."

To justify an act of substitution, there should be some affinity or similarity of nature between the parties. On this principle, angels, had they been willing to become sureties for them, could not possibly have brought relief to guilty men; nor could men have become sureties for fallen angels. There is no relation between them, nor any sameness of nature. Christ, therefore, to qualify himself as substitute for his people, took their nature into union with his own; for it "behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren," that he might be their kinsman and Redeemer. As man sinned, man must suffer. Hence, "he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham." "For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified must be all of one" nature; "for which cause Christ is not ashamed to call them brethren." He was "made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law." Had he not participated of the same nature with his people, no benefits could have resulted from his substitution in their room. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." He assumed the nature of his brethren, and he communicates his nature to them. He took their flesh, that he might impart to them his spirit.

Once more, in an affair of this nature, it is indis-

pensable that the substitute render to offended Deity, or to injured justice, a full satisfaction for all offences. No abatement can be allowed, whether the penalty fall upon the principal or the surety. On this head it may be affirmed, with assurance, that the work of Christ is so full and ample, that it is completely clear of all objections. His vicarious sufferings and death were fully adequate to all the demands that could be made upon those for whom he suffered. Every claim of satisfaction for their offences was fully answered. He laid down a sacrifice of infinite value, with which God was well pleased, and with which he remains for ever satisfied; so that he demands no more,—no other offering for sin. "By one offering Jesus hath perfected for ever all them that were sanctified," or set apart, and given to him to be redeemed. God has expressed his pleasure in the atonement, not only by raising Christ from the dead, but also by exalting him to his own right-hand, and giving him a name above every name.

Thus the substitution of Christ is the very centre and soul of the gospel. Remove this, and the whole dwindles into an unmeaning and useless system. This is a capital doctrine, on which the whole system depends. Take this away, and the fabric sinks into ruin.

CHAPTER III.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE SAVIOUR'S PERSON.

SECTION I.

The Union of two Natures in the Person of Christ.

In treating on the doctrine of atonement, or redemption, it must not, for a single moment, be forgotten that man has not only offended his Maker, but that he indulges an absolute hatred and spirit of rebellion against him, and that the Ransomer is to effect a reconciliation. In order to this, he must, on the one hand, be able to approach Jehovah, and, on the other, he must possess the nature of the offending party, that he may approach him also. The union of two natures in the person of Christ lies at the foundation of the whole evangelical system. If Jesus be not a man, he cannot stand in man's place, nor obey and suffer for him, nor be touched with a feeling of his infirmities. And if he be only a man, or a mere creature, whatever be the glory of his rank or the excellencies of his character, there can be no expiatory virtue in his sufferings and blood. Take Deity from the person of our Lord, and all the important doctrines of divine revelation are swept away. If Christ be not Jehovah, the way of salvation is completely blocked up, and the hope of the penitent for ever destroyed. On this point, however, the scripture gives us ample

information. Jesus is described as the Son of God, and the Son of man,—the Son of David and his Lord; the root and the offspring of David; the bright and morning Star. The same Word that was with God in the beginning, was God. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." God was manifest in the flesh; Jesus was Immanuel, God with us. Every divine perfection is ascribed to him, as omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, eternity, &c. He created and sustains all things; he will raise the dead and judge the world. Angels and glorified spirits worship him in heaven; and he claims the faith, the worship, and obedience of his people on earth. He is "over all, God blessed for ever," and thinks it no robbery to be equal with God. "I and my Father are one." But, notwithstanding his dignity, he is, by the union of human nature with the divine, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. He was made of a woman, and was a Child born, and a Son given, though the Mighty God and the Everlasting Father. He had a real human body, composed of materials like our own, subject to the same feelings of hunger, thirst, weariness, and the like. His soul also, with the exception of sin and impurity, was similar to ours; possessing the same faculties, affections, and feelings. Hence he feared, hoped, desired, and grieved even to tears. Thus he was qualified to suffer and die, which, considered simply in his divine nature, was altogether and absolutely impossible. "But, being found in fashion as a man, he became obedient to death, even the death of the cross."

These two natures were so united as to form

but one person. The human nature of Christ never existed alone as a person. He did not assume the person of man, but the *nature* of man. Here is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh. This justifies the boldest language. The Child born is the mighty God. The church of God is purchased with his own blood. But it is not designed in these pages to prove at length either the Deity of Christ or his humanity; but rather to point out their necessity in the scheme of human redemption, as revealed in the oracles of God. No other view of him will harmonize the testimony of prophets and apostles concerning him, nor warrant the confidence and hopes of the redeemed.

SECTION II.

The necessity of the Union of two Natures in the Person of Christ.

The union of two natures in the person of Christ was requisite to qualify him to produce a righteousness by which his people might be justified. The law must be perfectly obeyed by man, or man cannot be justified before God. The law is immutable; God cannot lower its demands in favour of rebels; and, unless man perfectly obey, he cannot enter into life. Jesus did yield the obedience required. Being God-man, his whole undertaking was a voluntary act of his grace, which rendered the beneficial effects of it transferrable. He freely put himself in the stead of others. And, as the human nature in Christ never existed as a person separately from the divine, it could not, as such, be separately and individually

under obligation to obey the law; therefore the obedience yielded by Christ is termed "the righteousness of God, which is unto all, and upon all them that believe." Christ is made unto his people righteousness, and they are "made the righteousness of God in him." "In Jehovah shall one say have I righteousness and strength." This is the name whereby he shall be called, "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." His divinity imparted an infinite value to his obedience and death, and rendered it possible for them, or the fruit of them, to be imputed and given to his people.

Jesus, being both God and man in the same person, was sufficiently qualified, not only to render obedience to the law, but also to make an atonement for sin. Man is a sinner, exposed to the curse of the law. Unless the penalty of that law be endured, and the honour of the divine government vindicated, it is evident the sinner cannot be honourably pardoned nor reconciled to God. But it was *man* that sinned, and *man* therefore against whom the law denounced its threatenings. Satisfaction is demanded of man, and must be given by the same nature which gave the offence. It is not suitable that one order of beings should commit the crime, and a different order repair the injury. Hence the necessity of the Son of God assuming the nature of those whose cause he undertook to plead. To be a merciful and faithful High Priest, he must be made like unto his brethren; and, that he might have somewhat to offer, a body was prepared for him. Considered simply as God, it was not possible for him to render obedience to the law given to man, nor to suffer and die in the place of the sinner. Yet without bloodshedding, there was no remission of sin. The

Saviour must of necessity be bruised and broken; must have flesh to give for the life of the world; and blood to shed for many for the remission of sins.

But it may be confidently affirmed that, though the Son of God could not, without the assumption of human nature, have presented an acceptable sacrifice to God for the sin of the people, yet that mere exclusive humanity could make no atonement. The blood of a mere man is as insufficient to put away sin as that of bulls and of goats. It was the Deity of Christ that gave worth and efficacy to his sacrifice. The divinity, inseparably united with humanity in the *one person* that died, stamped infinite value upon his offering; on which ground the apostle did not hesitate to affirm that the church of God was purchased with his own blood. "The brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person," he who made the worlds, and who upholds all things by the word of his power, purged our sins with his own blood. The Lord of hosts saith, "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man who is my Fellow." On the ground of the Saviour's Deity, such language is highly proper; but it could not, with any degree of truth, be applied to a mere creature.

None but one possessed of a divine nature could lay down his life and take it again. Indeed, the life of a creature is not his own. He has not any disposable property in his life. If, indeed, he had a right to give it away, yet he is destitute of power to take it again. To resume life is equal to the production of it. But that is beyond the range of a creature's ability. Personal destruction, or everlasting punishment, would of necessity be the result

if a mere creature should offer himself a sacrifice for sin. But the Redeemer had a life of his own to dispose of, and could lay it down and resume it again at his pleasure; and therefore, possessing the nature of man that sinned, and the nature of God, against whom sin was committed, he was fully qualified for the important work of bearing the curse of the law and obtaining eternal redemption for guilty men. "Such an High Priest became us, one who is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens."

This constitution of the Saviour's person is essential to the prevalent intercession which he lives to carry on in heaven. "We have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities," but we have one that is afflicted in all our afflictions, and knows how to succour them that are tempted.

> "He, in the days of feeble flesh,
> Poured out his cries and tears,
> And in his measure feels afresh
> What every member bears."—*Watts.*

Yet, were he not equally God, possessed of omniscience and omnipotence, he could not be acquainted with the circumstances of all his children, nor be able to relieve and deliver them. If only a man, he would not be able to save to the uttermost all that come to the Father, though he ever lived to make intercession for them.

It was highly necessary that the Redeemer should be possessed of both divine and human nature, that he might be able to succour his people in time of temptation and trouble. The apostle teaches this doctrine in the Epistle to the Hebrews. He first dwells upon his divinity "being the brightness of the Father's glory,

and the express image of his person," an object of angelic worship, and addressed by the Father in the most unequivocal language—"Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever;" he then represents him as taking flesh and blood, and being "made in all points like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." Hence he can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and can communicate grace to help in time of need. The Lord's people are described as "tempted ones." In the course of their obedience to God, they are exercised with many difficulties, trials, and dangers. There are certain seasons when temptations are permitted to run strong against them, and so impetuous as to threaten their ruin. Their whole lives are a conflict with them; and it is their comfort to know that Christ can succour them. His ability to do so depended on his partaking our nature, and in that nature suffering himself to be tempted. From his own experience he is qualified and disposed to succour. It is not only the power of his hand that secures his ability, but the compassion of his heart.

"Touch'd with the miseries myself have known,
I view with pity woes so like my own."

He affords speedy relief, strength, consolation, or deliverance, by his Spirit, his promise or providence to his people, who, being in distress, cry to him for help and succour in time of need.

From these remarks, it appears that the substitution of Christ to obey and suffer in the stead of his people, and the constitution of the person of Imma-

nuel, God with us, or, God manifest in the flesh, are capital doctrines in the Christian system, and essential to the obtaining of eternal redemption. Without the former our iniquities could not have met upon Jesus, nor could he have borne them in his own body upon the tree; neither could the benefits of his life and death have been transferrable to us; and, without the latter, he would not have been qualified to obey and suffer in our stead. "Though he were a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered." And being, by his incarnation, obedience, and death, made perfect, that is, fully qualified for the work which he undertook, he became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRICE PAID, AND THE OBJECTS PURCHASED.

SECTION I.

The Price paid for Man's Redemption.

THE ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion. They are represented as a purchased people, a purchased possession, bought with a price above all price, even the precious blood of Christ. They constitute "the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood."*

> "His life and blood the Shepherd pays
> A ransom for the flock." — *Watts.*

Though the death of Christ is generally considered as the price paid for man's redemption, yet it is not to be so considered exclusively, or apart from his obedience. He became obedient to death, even the death of the cross. His obedience was a course of suffering—and his suffering the perfecting and crowning act of his obedience. All his sufferings, and all his humiliation, from the first moment of his incarnation to his resurrection, were included in the propitiation for sin. "Satisfaction," says President Edwards, "was chiefly by his death,

* Isaiah xxxv. 10; 1 Peter ii. 19; Eph. i. 14; Acts xx. 28. See on this point chap. i. sec. iii.

because his sufferings and humiliation in that were the greatest. But all his other sufferings, and all his other humiliations, all along, had the nature of satisfaction:—the mean circumstances in which he was born; his being born of a virgin, in a stable, and laid in a manger; his taking human nature upon him in its low state, and under those infirmities brought on it by the fall; his being born in the likeness of sinful flesh, &c. And so all his sufferings, in his infancy and childhood, and all that labour, contempt, reproach, temptation, and difficulty of any kind which he suffered through the whole course of his life, was of a propitiatory and satisfactory nature." By the *same things* Christ both honoured the precept and endured the penalty of the law. He did not make satisfaction by some things, and then work out righteousness by other different things; but, in the same acts by which he wrought out righteousness, he also made satisfaction; but only taken in different relations. One and the same act, considered with respect to his obedience, was part of his righteousness; and, considered with respect to the suffering and humiliation with which he performed it, it had the nature of satisfaction. So his laying down his life, considered as bearing punishment in our stead, was an act of satisfaction to God's offended justice; but, considered as an act of obedience to God, who had given him a command to lay down his life for sinners, it constituted a part of his righteousness.* As death was the penalty denounced against sin, so it was by death chiefly that Jesus made atonement or expiation for sin, and

* See President Edwards on Redemption: Works, vol. v. p. 150, &c. Leeds Edition.

removed its awful curse. He now restored that which he took not away, and laid down his life a ransom price for his people. He bore our sins in his own body on the tree, and redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.

SECTION II.

The Objects purchased by the Redeemer's Death.

SOME writers distinguish between the purchase and the merit of Christ in the work of human redemption. They represent the sufferings of Jesus as purchasing the redemption of his people from misery, and his obedience as that by which he merited for them eternal life. They speak of purchased blessings, of purchased grace and glory. They consider that the Spirit was procured by the meritorious obedience and death of Christ, and that heaven is the purchased possession, &c. Dr. Watts says,

"There's ne'er a gift his hand bestows
But cost his heart a groan."*

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* Many lines expressing the same sentiment might be quoted from our sweet singer, than whom a superior poet on divine themes has not arisen among us. He says,

"We, for whom God the Son came down,
And labour'd for our good,
How careless to secure that crown
He purchased with his blood."
Second Book, Hymn 25.

"All the unknown joys he gives
Were bought with agonies unknown."
Third Book, Hymn 12.

This language of our justly-admired poet is not, in my opinion, consistent with the oracles of God. The merits of Christ are not, so far as I recollect, once named in the Bible. Nor is it easy to define what is intended by those who frequently employ the term. If they mean by merit, desert or worthiness of reward, it is granted. The man who pays a just price for an article, deserves that article, or is worthy of it. So the Redeemer is worthy of that which he has purchased. But then the question is, what did he purchase? Not temporal or spiritual blessings. I recollect no text of scripture that expresses or implies the sentiment. That we enjoy all our blessings, and even life itself, through the medium of the Saviour's death is certain; but I conceive that this is a very different idea from that of a purchase, or even a procurement, of those blessings. If they are bought or purchased, it must be by some equivalent given for them, and given to some agent who engages on those terms to deliver such blessings to the parties for whom they are purchased. Hence these blessings cannot be considered as free gifts from the Father to us; but, as being purchased by the Son, that Son bestows them upon his people. Whereas the scripture always speaks of them as the Father's gifts: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not

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"To make the purchased pleasure mine."

Third Book, Hymn 10.

"I call that legacy my own
Which Jesus did bequeath;
'Twas purchased with a dying groan,
And ratified in death."

Ibid., Hymn 3.

with him also freely *give* us all things?" "It is your Father's good pleasure to *give* you the kingdom." "It shall be *given* to them for whom it is prepared of my Father." "The *gift* of God is eternal life." So the Spirit, and consequently his graces and operations are always represented, not as a purchase from the Father, but as the Father's gift. "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father GIVE the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" "We are his witnesses, and so also is the Holy Ghost, whom God hath GIVEN to them that obey him." Forasmuch as God GAVE them the like GIFT as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I that I should withstand God?" "Then hath God also to the gentiles granted repentance unto life." All the influences of the Spirit, as well as the Spirit himself, are constantly represented as free donations, conferred upon the unworthy without money and without price. His enlivening, enlightening, sanctifying, and comforting influences are freely given, not purchased. The same may be affirmed respecting faith, repentance, hope, love, and all the blessings of pardon, peace, justification, grace, and glory. "Ye are saved by grace, through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the *gift* of God." "The Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will GIVE grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

If the Redeemer purchased the Holy Spirit for his people, will it not follow that he did so for himself? for the divine Father would observe the same line of conduct towards the Head of the church as to the members. Does not this view of the subject

reduce the economy of our salvation to a kind of bargain, and represent the whole affair in a light infinitely below the dignity and grandeur of the glorious Trinity? Can we suppose that the Father would dispose of the Spirit upon consideration of a price being paid for him? To whom should the price be given? On what ground can the Spirit need to be ransomed, redeemed, or bought? He had never trespassed, never been lost. Besides, he is uniformly represented, not as a purchase, but a gift, whether to the Saviour or his people. Of the former, it is said, "God GIVETH not the Spirit by measure unto him." "He was anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows." "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me," saith Immanuel. All the blessings of salvation, from first to last, are *free gifts*; Jesus himself being the principal one, or sum of the whole. "God so loved the world that he GAVE his only begotten Son," and in him and with him every other favour. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

SECTION III.

The Church exclusively purchased by the Redeemer's Death.

THE Redeemer, in my opinion, by his death purchased or redeemed the church, and the church only, with his own blood. The peculiar (or, as some render the term, the *purchased*) people were bought, "not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ,

as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

> "The Saviour shed his blood for men, not heaven,
> To purchase persons not for blessings given:
> Where satisfaction's rightly understood,
> Persons, not things, must be the price of blood.
> And, all the other blessings added, can't but be
> The unfeigned *gift* of the Eternal Three."

The case may be thus represented:—The Lord's people are compared to sheep going astray. They have committed trespass. For this trespass recompense is demanded. Law and justice require satisfaction, or the sheep shall be detained. Jesus, therefore, as the good Shepherd, giveth his life for the sheep—lays it down as a ransom for the flock, and thus renders satisfaction, and restores that which he took not away. On the ground of his death, law and justice are both completely satisfied; so that now, whenever the sinner is willing, or whenever divine influence is exerted, he may be liberated. There is not any charge upon which he can be detained. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ who died, yea, rather, that is risen again." "He died for our sins, and he rose again for our justification." They were his own property even before he bought them; and, therefore, when he is said to purchase them, it is to be understood with limitation, not strictly as the purchase of that which was another's, but as the redemption of that which was previously his own; just as a person redeems that which is detained on account of damage, or that which has been previously pledged. We had sold ourselves for nought into the hand of law and justice, and we are redeemed, not by money, but by blood. His death is

the price of our redemption or deliverance. We have redemption in his blood, the forgiveness of sins, that is, pardon for our trespasses, and, therefore, deliverance from the curse of the broken covenant.

But it is worthy of observation, that the good Shepherd did not lay down his life to purchase a pasture for his flock. He had already every thing they could possibly need,—he had prepared for them all the blessings of grace and glory, as all the delights of paradise were ready for Adam before he was created. The people were lost, but grace and glory never were. He bought his flock for the pasture, but not the pasture for the flock. Some have supposed that Christ, by his death, so pleased the Father, that he entered into a new covenant of grace with his people ; and that all that is contained in that covenant was owing to, founded on, and procured by the obedience and death of Christ. I am differently minded, and believe, with others, that Christ, as the gift of God, and the Mediator, is himself included in the covenant of grace, and that it contained all our salvation and all our desire.

The case may be represented by another figure. A person has a large building filled with machinery—he is in possession also of a large stream of water, by which, if applied, this machinery might all be set in motion, and turned to good account; but between the building and the stream there is a space of ground elevated above both ; the water, therefore, is obstructed, and cannot come into contact with the machinery. The owner of both employs proper means, and a channel is cut through the mountain at his own expense, in which the stream of

water may flow freely to the building, without let or hindrance. It is now, therefore, at the discretion and by the command of the owner, applied to the principal wheel which moves and governs all the rest of the machinery. The whole is now set in motion, and the important ends of the proprietor are accomplished. Apply this to illustrate the subject before us, so far as figures can illustrate the important truths of the gospel. Let the building and machinery represent man, with all his bodily and mental powers, and the stream of water the Holy Spirit—let sin be the elevated ground that separates them, and prevents their coming in contact—and let then the sufferings of Christ be the means which the proprietor, Jehovah, has employed to open a channel, or a new and living way, through which the water of life can flow, freely and justly, to the sinner, and we have the application. The person did not purchase the stream of water: he possessed it. It was his own property. He merely made a way for it to pass; so Jehovah Jesus did not purchase the Holy Spirit, but made a way for the communication of the Spirit to the sinner's mind, consistently with the demands of the law, and all the rights of Jehovah's throne and government. Thus, "we are saved by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly, through our Lord Jesus." As the water goes through the opened channel to the building, so the Spirit comes to us, through the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ; not as purchased, nor even as procured, but as freely bestowed in the divinely appointed way. If Jesus purchased salvation, it might be asked, if he purchased himself, for he is the salvation of his people. "Behold,

God is my salvation." "The Lord is my light and my salvation."

We may speak of the merit of Jesus Christ, with its derivatives, in a sense consistent with the analogy of faith and the oracles of God, but it must then be used with sobriety, and kept within proper limits. The Scriptures will not warrant the assertion that Christ merited eternal life, either by his obedience or his death; or, that it, and the blessings connected with it, are bestowed as the reward of his meritorious obedience and sufferings. He obeyed to honour the law for his people, that they might have a righteousness to appear in before God; and he suffered to remove their guilt, that the barrier to their access to God, happiness, and eternal life, might be removed out of the way. By his death, he saves his people from the hand of justice, and so from eternal death; and by his life, he provides them a garment to adorn them, in which they may approach God with acceptance and enjoy eternal life. Any other idea of merit or purchase I cannot find in the Bible.

Few persons have written better upon the doctrine of imputed righteousness than the celebrated Mr. Hervey. He observes—

"The merits of Christ is certainly an ambiguous phrase, and what I can by no means admire; but as it occurs in Mr. Wesley's letter, and in many valuable writers, I have, led by their example, used it in the following debate. To gratify Mr. Wesley, I have admitted his phrase, *the merits of Christ*, though, as it is a phrase of dubious import, and what almost any sect or heresy will subscribe, I should much sooner choose to abide by Aspasio's

language. And why should we not all speak with the Scriptures ?"*

"The Scriptures appear to me to represent the death of Christ as making perfect satisfaction to divine justice; not as conferring a benefit which should lay the Father under a natural obligation to repay, but as doing that which was well-pleasing in his sight, and which his infinite love of righteousness would necessarily induce him to reward. Isaiah liii. 10—12, &c., &c."†

The Socinians (or Unitarians, as they would be denominated) charge the Calvinists with representing the Supreme Being as implacable and unforgiving, and that salvation on the Calvinistic system is not by grace; for, say they, "On your plan, God demands full satisfaction for every offence; and not till the Redeemer has fully discharged every debt, can the sinner be released, nor can he then enjoy any blessing but what has been most richly merited and dearly purchased by the Saviour." They therefore ask, "Where is the grace and the love of God manifested in salvation on such a plan? Jehovah gives nothing, remits nothing, but what has been fairly merited, hardly earned, or dearly bought. In such a salvation there may be justice, but there can be no grace on the part of God the Father." Such is their language, nor can it be fairly met by those who represent the blessings of grace and glory either as the *merit* of the Saviour's life, or the *purchase* of his

* Hervey's Eleven Letters to Wesley. Letter I.

† Fuller. Memoirs by Morris, pp. 415, 416.

death. But let Jesus be represented as yielding obedience to God's unchanging law by his life and by his death, as paying a price for his church, and thereby opening a way for the communication of spiritual blessings to the unworthy, and the whole economy of grace appears in harmony and beauty. "For it became him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." He is the medium of communication, the new and living way consecrated for us, in which we can draw nigh to God, in full assurance of faith. God can, through him, communicate spiritual blessings to guilty men, and admit sinners into communion with himself. "Through Christ, we have access by one Spirit unto the Father."

"'Tis through the purchase of His death
Who hung upon the tree
The Spirit is sent down to breathe
On such dry bones as we."*

The scripture everywhere speaks of persons, and not things, as the objects of the Redeemer's purchase. Let the following texts, as a sample of what might be produced, be seriously considered. "He loved the church, and gave himself for it." "Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with

* See Mr. Fuller's Letter to Dr. John Erskine, where he represents the "real difference between satisfaction, merit, &c., as made in cases of debt and credit, and in cases of *crime*, where the injury respects character and government. In the one case, a full satisfaction made by a surety to a creditor precludes the exercise of forgiving mercy on his part towards the debtor. But it is not so in the other."

his own blood." "He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity." "He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities." "He gave his life a ransom for many." "Ye are redeemed, not with corruptible things." "Ye are not your own, but ye are bought with a price." "Ye are a peculiar (a purchased) people,"—"the purchased possession,"—"the ransomed of the Lord." "He hath redeemed us to God by his blood."

These portions of holy writ give us one uniform representation of the Saviour's purchase; but they afford no countenance to the idea of purchased blessings, or of a price paid for grace and for glory.*

* A judicious and scriptural Essay, by an able pen, upon the doctrine of *merit,* and especially on *the merits of* CHRIST, would, I am persuaded, greatly subserve, and promote the cause of truth.

CHAPTER V.

THE FRUITS AND EFFECTS OF REDEMPTION.

Redemption, I conceive, not only makes men salvable, but actually secures their salvation. It proceeds upon satisfaction given, and therefore includes justification and freedom from guilt, as also deliverance from the power of Satan and the dominion of sin. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." "We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption there is in Christ Jesus." He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law. By the blood of his cross he spoiled principalities and powers, destroyed death, and him that had the power of death. Our old man was crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed. And we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ once for all. It secures our resurrection from the dead, and our actual possession of everlasting blessedness and glory. His dying was the death of death, and the destruction of the grave. In Christ shall all be made alive. Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood. These things, I conceive, are included in redemption, and cannot by any means be frustrated. Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, in all that are redeemed by our Lord Jesus Christ.

SECTION I.

Deliverance from Guilt by the Death of Christ.

DELIVERANCE from *the guilt of sin* is one of the principal effects or fruits of the death of Christ. "He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification." "He bore our sins in his own body upon the tree." "He was made sin for us." "The Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all." "He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed." "He made an end of sin, finished transgression, and made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness." Hence we are exhorted to "behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." As the sin of those for whom he suffered was laid upon him, and he bore it, and took it away, the curse due unto it is removed from them.*

* We know that this doctrine may be abused, but what truth is not, one way or other, liable to abuse? It is at the sinner's peril if he draw poison from the fairest flowers. Some turn the grace of God into wantonness, and hold the truth in unrighteousness. But these cannot have learned Christ.

Let the sinner say, if he dare, that "his debts are paid out of another man's purse, that he holds his acquittance, and that he has nothing to do but to believe that he owes nothing; nay, that his debts were all remitted before he was able to contract them; that all his duties are done by another man's obedience, and all his sins discounted by another man's sufferings; and it is safe to sin upon condition that he despair not, but believe without doubting." This is no just inference from the doctrine asserted, but the very reverse. It is doing evil that good may come, and proves the damnation of such to be an act of divine justice.—(See Dr. Pierce on the Equity of the Gospel, p. 7.)

He "hath redeemed us from the curse of the law himself, being made a curse for us." "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again." Those for whom he died, are delivered from going down into the pit, because God hath found and accepted a ransom. He hath put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. He hath put it away—he hath taken it away. Our sins could not be laid upon him, and yet left upon us. They cannot be borne by him in his own body on the tree, and yet borne by us too. If Jesus virtually reconciled us to God by his death, it was by atoning, or making satisfaction for our guilt. That atonement was accepted, and, therefore, guilt is covered and removed; and the redeemed, be they in number as the sand of the sea, are delivered from sin by his blood. Hence, says the apostle, "We are justified by his blood." This blood cleanseth from all sin. Their guilt shall no more be laid to their account; justice is satisfied, and will claim no more.* They are redeemed from the curse of a broken law, from the wrath to come, and saved from the damnation of hell. Their iniquities are removed from them as far as the east is from the west. The God of peace, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, will be merciful to their unrighteousness,

* "*The Doctrine of Justification,*" by Anthony Burgess, is a work which will well repay the pains of a serious perusal. Among other points discussed at large, he treats of the Righteousness of God, and of the satisfaction and merits of Christ.

and their sins and iniquities he will remember no more.

Either guilt is removed by the death of Christ, or it remains; and if it yet remains, by what means shall it be removed? There remaineth no more sacrifice for sin. No other acceptable offering can be presented to God. If sin was not removed, and a perfect atonement made, when the Redeemer expired upon the cross, then the death of Christ did not effect our redemption. "It is finished," said the dying Saviour, and, therefore, nothing more remained to be done. The Jewish sacrifices are described as inefficient, and unable to take away sin. Hence they were repeated, and a remembrance of sins was made again every year. "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins." This being the case, the Saviour said, "Lo, I come, to do thy will, O God! He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ ONCE for all;" that is, the work is wholly and completely perfected. "And every priest standeth daily ministering, and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this man, after he had offered ONE sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by ONE OFFERING he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." On the ground of this offering, Jehovah declares that he will put his laws in the hearts of the redeemed, and will remember their sins and iniquities no more.

Are we not here taught, as plainly as language

can express, the sentiment, that sin and guilt are removed by the sacrifice of Christ? The sins of those for whom the Saviour bled may be sought for, but cannot be found. They are washed away in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. God has perfectly accomplished what he spoke by his servant the prophet, "I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day."

SECTION II.

Deliverance from the Dominion of Sin the effect of the Redeemer's Death.

ANOTHER of the fruits or effects of redemption consists in a deliverance from *the power of sin.* The death of Christ is designed to be the death of sin. "Our old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed; that henceforth we should not serve sin." Jesus was manifested to take away our sin,—to save us from our sins,—to deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, that we might serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life. This he designed to accomplish, or to secure, by means of his death. "He loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he MIGHT SANCTIFY and CLEANSE it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." He designed to effect the sanctification of all them for whom he died. "He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us to himself a peculiar

people, zealous of good works." From his side not only flowed blood to pardon, but water to purify and cleanse. The fountain opened was, not only for sin or guilt, but for uncleanness, to wash or purge away the filth of the daughter of Zion. "He gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world;"—to redeem us from our vain conversation, received by tradition from our fathers, that we might live, not unto ourselves, but to Him that died for us. "For, to this end, he both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." The apostle addresses the redeemed in this language—"Ye are not your own, but ye are bought with a price; therefore, glorify God with your bodies and spirits which are his." Not only are the redeemed under the most powerful obligations to obedience and universal holiness, but their compliance is secured. By his stripes they must be healed. They would remain for ever ignorant of their obligation to redeeming love did not his death make way for and secure the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit to "convince of sin, of righteousness, and judgment to come." Hence it was promised to the Saviour, that, upon making his soul an offering for sin, he should see his seed;—should see the travail of his soul, and be satisfied. Indeed, if the redemption of Christ did not secure sanctification as well as pardon, the latter could not be enjoyed, or prove of any lasting advantage. The removal of guilt was in order to the removal of impurity, and to render the salvation of the redeemed consistent with the perfections of God, the rights of his throne, and the nature, spirit, and sanctions of the divine law. Redemption cannot be considered as perfect

or complete if the objects of it are suffered to remain in a state of enmity and ignorance, of impenitence and unbelief. Nor will the Redeemer be satisfied until those he has redeemed be known as "the holy people." I conclude, then, that redemption includes an emancipation from the thraldom, bondage, and slavery of sin, and Satan, and the world;—a deliverance from the love, power, and practice of iniquity, and a holy conformity of heart and life to the image of Him who is the first-born among many brethren. It secures holiness as well as forgiveness, and purity of heart as well as peace of mind.

SECTION III.

The Resurrection of the Body a Fruit of the Saviour's Death.

REDEMPTION, taken in its enlarged sense, includes the *resurrection of the body* at the last day. So the apostle teaches where he speaks of "waiting for the adoption,—to wit, the redemption of the body." He refers here to the power the Redeemer will exert when he comes, "to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe." "We look for the appearance of the great God, and our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself." He has pledged himself to raise up at the last day all who eat his flesh and drink his blood—all that are drawn to him and given him by the Father. "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which

he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." Therefore he speaks, by the prophet, in the most absolute form—"I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction; repentance shall be hid from mine eyes." The resurrection of Christ, as the head of his body, the church, secures the resurrection of those for whom he died. He his the first-fruits, and secures the harvest. "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise." He is, therefore, "the resurrection and the life," and says, "Because I live, ye shall live also." Inspired writers speak of the resurrection of the saints as the crowning point of their redemption. They are said to be sealed by the Holy Spirit of God to the day of redemption. In the same epistle, the Holy Spirit of promise is represented as "the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession to the praise of his glory." The purchased possession is the church, which the Saviour purchased with his blood; and the redemption of it refers here, not to deliverance from the guilt or power of sin, but from the power of the grave, by the resurrection of the body at the last day. So, in the first epistle to the Corinthians, "Christ Jesus is said to be made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." It is natural to infer, from redemption being placed after sanctification, that it refers to the resurrection; when the Lord Jesus shall put his finishing hand to the glorious work, and present all his redeemed before God and the Father, unblamable in holiness, before the throne of his glory, with exceeding joy. Then he will be

glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe. When death is destroyed and "swallowed up in victory," hell conquered, his people all raised in power and glory, in his own image, then will he say, "Father, here am I, and the children thou hast given me; and of all that thou hast given me, I have lost nothing." Then the mystery of God shall be finished, and the work of redemption completed, and all heaven shall écho with the sound, "Grace, Grace unto it!" All the ransomed of the Lord shall "come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Redemption, therefore, comprises a deliverance from guilt, from the dominion, power, and love of sin; from the grave, and, consequently, from the very being of sin, and from all its effects and consequences. But the term may, in some places, be restricted to one or two of these ideas; yet, in that case, redemption is partial and limited. If a person could possibly be redeemed by price from the hand of justice, and thus delivered from guilt, yet, if left in the thraldom and bondage of sin, he could not be said to be completely redeemed. On the other hand, could we suppose a person to be delivered, or redeemed by power, from the love, and practice, and slavery of sin; yet, if left under the load of guilt, and the curse of the law, we should not consider him to have full redemption in Christ. Nor could the whole man be said to be redeemed if the body were to be left under the power of the grave. The redemption which is by Jesus Christ, is the earnest and forerunner of perfect and everlasting holiness and happiness; of grace and sanctification in this life, and, in the world to come, life everlasting.

SECTION IV.

The Atonement or the Redemption of Christ unconditional, certain, and complete.

THESE fruits of redemption are either absolute or conditional. Either there is a necessary connexion between the death of Christ and the salvation of those for whom he died, or there is no ground of certainty, arising from his death, that any one of the human race will be saved. Salvation may be possible and probable. Some one or another may avail himself of the atonement made; but none can affirm, with certainty, on the ground of that atonement, that any of the sons of Adam shall be saved.* If the efficiency or application of the atonement be suspended upon any conditions to be performed by man, compliance with which conditions is not absolutely provided for in the covenant of grace, I conclude that the death or atonement of Christ will be, in respect of salvation, entirely without effect. But surely the effect of the Saviour's death is not left contingent and conditional upon the unaided volitions of men. Redemption by his blood had no dependence upon any previous desert, or any foreseen goodness in the creature; nor is its efficacy suspended on the will or conduct of man to make it effectual or ineffectual at his pleasure. Its ultimate

* "That Christ should die ought rather to have been conditional, and not the salvation of those he should die for; and so, in prudence, should have been deferred to the end of the world, to see if any fruit would come of it, and if not, then not to die at all, for why should he die in vain?"—(Elisha Coles on God's Sovereignty.)

design, which is the perfect happiness of all the redeemed, will most assuredly be accomplished.

What saith the Scriptures upon this important point? "If, when we were enemies, we *were* [virtually] *reconciled* to God by the death of his Son, much more, being [actually] reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. Being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." "Christ died for us, that we should live together with him." "I lay down my life for the sheep; them also I must bring, and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd." The application of redemption to all for whom the Saviour died is not left in any uncertain, contingent state; but is absolute, determinate, and perfect. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied."

The atonement of Christ, or redemption by his cross, is perfect and complete. Jesus has rendered to the law perfect obedience; it cannot require any thing more to constitute a justifying righteousness. All the claims of divine justice have also been answered. Jesus has suffered the whole penalty, borne the whole curse due to his people, and entirely emptied his Father's cup. His obedience unto death was stamped with absolute perfection, and is altogether sufficient to answer all the purposes for which, by infinite wisdom and eternal love, it was designed. It includes virtually the deliverance of the redeemed from all evil, and their elevation to unbounded and everlasting happiness. I cannot conceive of anything wanting. Jesus has obtained eternal redemption for his people. He pleads in heaven for those for whom he suffered on earth. He is entered into heaven as their fore-

runner; and where he is, there they shall be also. Every thing is promised to render their happiness certain. They shall be delivered from sin, from impenitence, unbelief, and enmity, and shall be regenerated, sanctified, preserved, and saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation. Christ shall see his seed, the purchase of his blood, and heaven shall resound with their praises for ever. "To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

PART II.

ON THE EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT OR REDEMPTION OF CHRIST.

CHAPTER I.

THE OBJECTS OF REDEMPTION.

THE question, *For whom did the Redeemer die?* is one of great importance in the system of theology. To determine this hastily or with dogmatism is not wise. It should be examined with care and candour, and its different bearings cautiously considered. The Bible should be regarded as the only absolute and infallible guide. From its decisions there lies no appeal. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." But when the Bible is silent, we should have no disposition to investigate; and when it speaks, we should listen and follow without fear. What, then, saith the Scriptures respecting the objects of redemption? or, in other words, *For whom did the Redeemer die?*

SECTION I.

The Objects of Redemption.

THE Scriptures warrant us to affirm that Jesus did not die for angels. The holy angels need no Redeemer, and for the fallen ones no Saviour is

provided. "For, verily," saith the apostle, speaking of the incarnation of the Saviour, "he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham." Though the elect angels are confirmed in a state of purity and bliss, and constitute a part of the family in heaven and earth, the whole of which is named of Christ, and over which he is placed as the head, yet they are not redeemed by him. They are said to be reconciled, and to be gathered together with his redeemed people, in him. They approve of him in human nature as their Lord; rejoice in the plan or economy of redemption, as accomplished by him; and with the greatest alacrity, at his command, become ministering spirits to them who shall be heirs of salvation. They study with delight the mysteries of redemption, but cannot join in the song of the redeemed. The angels say, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain;" but the ransomed of the Lord say, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain FOR US." "To him that loved us, and washed us from OUR sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen." In this song angels cannot bear a part.

The objects of redemption are sinners of mankind. Adam, in a state of purity and of bliss, needed no redemption. Sin and misery are implied in the doctrine. Christ came into the world to save, and, in order to salvation, to redeem sinners. "Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." On this point there can be no dispute among those who receive the Scriptures as a revelation from Jehovah.

There has, however, been much controversy in

the Christian church respecting the extent of this redemption, whether Jesus died for *all* men, or only for *some* men, and whether his death *secures* the salvation of any man absolutely and infallibly, or only renders men *salvable*. Perhaps some parts, and particularly the angry parts, of these controversies, have arisen from a misunderstanding of words. The parties might not attach the same ideas to the terms employed by one another, and hence they have dealt in mere logomachies. The terms, *general* and *universal*, *special* and *particular*, *redemption*, *atonement*, *the world*, *the whole world*, *all*, *many*, *every*, &c., have been used and beaten about by contending parties, without measure or mercy, and often without any precise definition or understanding of their real and various import. I generally use the terms special and particular for the same idea, and design to signify by them, when applied to redemption or atonement, that it is limited in its extent, in opposition to the terms general and universal, when they are considered as including all and every individual of the human race. I shall employ them in the popular sense, on the one side to signify that redemption is limited, with respect to its objects, to a part of mankind; and on the other side, as unlimited, and therefore including the whole family of man, from the beginning to the end of time.

The latter opinion I consider as maintained by the Arminians, the Wesleyans, by some of the General Baptists, and by many in the church of England; and the former to have been generally the opinion of those who have been reputed the followers of Calvin. Though I regard neither Calvin nor Arminius as my leader in matters of religion, I

yet maintain and believe many points in common with them both; but in respect to the limits of redemption, I consider the opinion that restricts it to the elect, to be more consistent with the revelation of God, and even to the dictates of reason, than that of the Arminians, who extend it to every individual of the human race. I conceive that redemption, strictly speaking, cannot be more extensive than election or salvation. As we cannot, with propriety of speech, nor consistent with the Scriptures, affirm that the whole of the human race, without exception, are elected, or will be saved; so, I think, we cannot justly affirm of any of the damned that they are redeemed. However, before I proceed to establish this point by argument, it will be necessary to premise a few particulars.

SECTION II.

The infinite value of the Atonement.

It is freely admitted that the redemption of one individual soul could not have been effected but by the death of Christ. If one individual sinner alone must be saved, the surety must bear the penalty due to his trangression. That penalty is death. If myriads of the human race are to be saved, the penalty is not to be multiplied by the number of the individuals, and so many deaths to be endured; for then must the Redeemer, as the apostle says on another supposition, "often have suffered since the foundation of the world." But a repetition was not necessary, for "He offered himself *once* for all —he appeared *once* in the end of the world to put

away sin by the sacrifice of himself—and by *one* offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." Had there been worlds to redeem, I presume the death of Christ, considered in its own nature, would have been amply sufficient, provided the relative connexion between him and them had existed.* The very nature of the penalty or curse to be endured, renders its repetition not only unnecessary, but impossible. Hence also in earthly courts, where the crime is capital, according to the law of the country, the culprit is only, *can* only be, executed once, whether his conviction be for one or for ten offences. He can but die once. Such is the dignity of the person of Christ, the sinner's substitute, that infinite value attaches to the one offering and sacrifice which he presented. No limits can be set to its worth, and, therefore, it must be sufficient for all for whom it was intended.† And

* "I consider," says Mr. Fuller, "that if one sinner only had been saved consistently with justice, it required to be by the same all-perfect obedience unto death; and this being yielded, is *itself* equally adapted to save a world as an individual, provided a world believed in it."—(Fuller's Memoirs, by Morris, p. 408.)

"That which is equally necessary for one as for many, must, in its own nature, be equally sufficient for many as for one."—(Fuller's Six Letters in the "Baptist Magazine," March, 1827.)

Richard Baxter remarks, "That the mercy of God hath provided for all mankind so sufficient a Saviour, that no sinner shall perish for want of a sufficient satisfaction made for his sins by Christ, nor is it made the condition of any man's salvation or pardon, that he satisfy for his own sins."—(Melancholy, p. 69.)

† "The substitutionary sufferings of Christ were of infinite value, is readily allowed, and so they would have been had he expired on the cross for the redemption of one sinner only. Every sin, objectively considered, has infinite demerit, and, therefore, he that shall sustain the penalty, with a view to rescue the offender from perdition, must pay a price equal to the guilt."—(Gethsemane.)

besides, his death could not be repeated. He, dying once, "dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him; for in that he died, he died unto sin once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God."

It is also acknowledged, without reluctance, that the sufferings of Christ were not apportioned to him as being exactly, and in every respect, what the sinners themselves must have endured, in their own persons, provided he had not died for them. They were not so proportioned that he suffered more for one sinner than for another; not more for Solomon than for David; not more for Manasseh than for Obadiah or Josiah; not more for the malefactor on the cross, for the Magdalen, for the persecuting Saul of Tarsus, for the wicked and profligate Corinthians, than for Cornelius, the devout, and others of the redeemed, who had never run into such excess of riot, nor disgraced themselves with extravagant external wickedness. I do not conceive that the Saviour suffered or was punished for sins in number, weight, and measure; so that if another sinner had been added to the number of the redeemed, that there must have been an additional proportion of sufferings endured, and a greater quantity of blood shed; or, that if any of the saved had committed more crimes than they have committed, that Jesus must have suffered more intensely on that account. But the admission of these points does not involve the conclusion, that redemption is general, or that, according to the common way of expressing it, *Jesus died for all.*

I consider the Redeemer, in his death, in the character of a substitute, dying for, or in the place of, his people, "the just for the unjust, to bring them to God." On this head Mr. Fuller says, "For

Christ to die as a substitute, if I understand the term, is the same thing as his dying *for us*, or *in our stead*, or that *we should not die*." "If it be a proper definition of the substitution of Christ, that he died for, or in the place of others, that they should not die; this, as comprehending the designed end to be answered by his death, is strictly applicable to none but the elect; for whatever ground there is for sinners, as sinners, to believe and be saved, it never was the design of Christ to impart faith to any others than those who were given him of the Father. He, therefore, did not die with the intent that any others *should not die*." This language, whether it can be reconciled with what our author has said elsewhere, I shall not determine; but, so far as I understand it, it exactly expresses the sentiment for which I plead.

SECTION III.

Redemption, Special and Particular.

I SHALL endeavour to prove that the objects of redemption are not *all* men universally, in the strict sense of those words, but *some* men, though these are many; "a multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues." The question is, not whether few or many were redeemed, but whether any were not redeemed; and if but one was left unredeemed, then, I conceive, particular redemption must be admitted. And here, in passing, I might just refer to the case of Judas, of whom the Redeemer said,

upon the eve of his sufferings, "It had been good for that man if he had not been born." Can it be supposed, then, that Jesus died for him? Could Judas ever have joined the Apostle Paul, with truth, in pronouncing the language, "He loved me and gave himself for me"?

Dan Taylor (if I understand his system) included the forgiveness of sins in the doctrine of redemption, and used the term in the same restricted sense as that of salvation; and, consequently, whatever his ideas might be on the extent of the death of Christ, he could not properly be considered as the advocate of universal redemption.*

That redemption is special and particular, and not universal, appears evident from this consideration—that the effects or fruits of it are not universally experienced. "It was necessary that redemption should have a farther reach than to bring men into a salvable state, and that could not be less than a state of certain salvation."† "Christ died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him."‡ Here, eternal life with Jesus in glory, is the declared and secured end of those for whom the Saviour died. That many of our fellow sinners live and die under the guilt and power of sin, is a fact too plain to be denied. We must either admit this, or maintain that none of the human race are lost. But can it be said, that those who perish everlastingly were redeemed from the curse of the law—from this present evil world—were

* See his Controversy with Andrew Fuller. Also, Fuller's Memoirs, by Morris, pp. 277, 278.

† Elisha Coles on God's Sovereignty, p. 196.

‡ 1 Thess. v. 10.

reconciled unto God—were redeemed unto God by the blood of Jesus—that he bore their sins in his own body on the tree—that he suffered for them, to bring them to God—that they have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins—that they are justified by his blood—by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus? Can all this be affirmed of those who are not delivered from going down into the pit, nor saved from the wrath to come? For what then was the ransom paid? Who is he that condemneth those for whom the Saviour died? If he died for our offences, he rose again for our justification;—if he bore our sins in his own body on the tree, he bore them away from us, that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness. Hence, he is the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. The effects of redemption are the removal of guilt, and of the curse of the law; deliverance from the dominion and love of sin, from the power of the grave, and from the very being and consequences of iniquity, in time and eternity. How, then, can those be redeemed who die the second death? Liberty was the effect of redemption under the law; and if that was the case typically, it must be so in the thing signified, or the figure is broader than the reality. I should contend, therefore, that no atonement was made for the sins of those who were in hell at the time the Redeemer died, and that they could not be the objects of his redemption. By parity of reasoning, I should consider that those were equally excluded who will eventually be lost, and who will suffer the vengeance of eternal fire. "All purchased by Immanuel's blood shall sit around the

throne of him who loved them and gave himself for them."*

Besides, if redemption be considered under the notion of a purchase, it cannot be conceived that those who are bought at such a price should finally perish. Jesus shall be satisfied, and the souls purchased with his blood shall spend eternal ages with him in glory. None of the effects of redemption are experienced by them who are finally lost. Redemption, therefore, is not universal. This will further appear if we consider that the typical sacrifices, under the law, were presented exclusively for Israel, and not for the nations of the Gentile world. Will not this by analogy prove that the vicarious sacrifice of Christ was offered exclusively for the spiritual, the chosen Israel of God? The extent of election is not narrower than that of redemption. The latter relates to the same individuals, and in all its beneficial effects terminates upon them exclusively. The objects of the Father's love are the purchase of the Saviour's blood. As Israel were redeemed from Egypt, so the elect, or chosen Israel of God, are redeemed from among men; and as the seed of Jacob were always considered and spoken of distinct from the rest of mankind, so are the ransomed of the Lord. "And they shall call them, The holy people,—The redeemed of the Lord; and thou shalt be called, Sought ought,—A city not forsaken." They are, "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar (a purchased) people." The Jewish high priest entered the holy place with the blood of beasts, specifically to

* Mann, on the Atonement, 2nd edit., p. 115.

make an atonement and intercession for Israel exclusively; nor can we extend the atonement, or offering of Christ, beyond the limits of God's chosen or elect people without creating a disagreement or dissimilitude between the type and the antetype.*

If any for whom Christ died finally perish, then all for whom he died may, on the same ground, perish also; and thus the death of Christ does not secure with certainty the salvation of one individual. On this principle, the hope of salvation must be founded on something else rather than the foundation God hath laid in Zion. "From the connexion in which we have placed this doctrine," says a certain author, "it will appear that we do not consider it as entering into the meritorious cause of salvation"† Paul would rejoice in nothing, save in the CROSS of our Lord Jesus Christ; and was deter-

* "The Levitical sacrifices were offered for the house of Israel, exemptive of other nations; and these being a type of the spiritual elect, it follows that this sacrifice of Christ (typified by theirs) was also peculiar to Jews in spirit; for he is only reckoned a Jew that is such inwardly in the spirit.—(Rom. ii. 29.) So Aaron's bearing the names of the twelve tribes on his breast-plate was typical of our great High Priest bearing the names and sustaining the persons of those for whom he offered himself on the cross."—(Elisha Coles, pp. 201, 202.)

There were some sins under the former dispensation for which no sacrifices were appointed under the law. David probably refers to them when he says, "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it;" and when he mentions presumptuous sins, and the great transgression. Analogous to this, there is also a sin under the gospel dispensation, for which there is no forgiveness, neither in this world, neither in the world to come; that is, neither under the Jewish nor Christian dispensation. It naturally follows, that if no sacrifice is offered for that sin, the person guilty of it could not be redeemed.

† Hinton's Theology, p. 174.

mined to know nothing, as the matter of his ministry, the foundation of his hope, and the source of his joy, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. But can such resolutions be justified, as wise, if those for whom the Saviour suffered and died may be finally damned? He either did or did not represent those for whom he died; or, in other words, he either died *for* sinners or he did not. If the substitution of Christ in the sinner's place, and the imputation of the transgressor's sin to him, and his bearing it in his own body on the tree, be denied, then, indeed, those *for* whom he died, if he can be said to die *for any*, may, notwithstanding, be left liable to perish. But this I should consider as a relinquishment of the doctrine of redemption. For if the point of imputation be given up, the foundation of Christianity seems to be destroyed. Christ is said to die FOR us—FOR the ungodly—FOR sinners—to suffer FOR us—to be made SIN FOR us; these and similar expressions, which abound in the Scriptures, surely imply, or rather directly teach, that Christ suffered in the room or stead, and on the behalf of men. He specifically represented sinners, personally considered, and stood in their place to remove the curse from them. Can those for whom he suffered, whose sins he bore, be called to suffer in their own persons what was due to the sins for which the Redeemer himself had suffered? Or shall not those for whom he bled be sanctified and cleansed with the washing of water by the word, and made meet for an inheritance among the saints in light? If any may be lost for whom the Captain of our salvation suffered, then they all may be lost, and the bringing of many sons to glory by means of his death may completely fail. It may so happen, on this plan, that not *any*

may be brought; or if they be, it will not arise from, or depend upon, their being redeemed by his blood, but must be attributed to some other cause; for a redemption not securing salvation may be altogether in vain. But that is a conclusion I am not prepared to grant.*

"Some tell us that Christ died *conditionally* for all men, but *absolutely* for no man! In other words, that there is no necessary connexion between the death of Christ and the salvation of any of the human race." But this sentiment appears to me to

* "According to Mr. Taylor's scheme, the redemption and salvation of the whole human race is left to uncertainty,—to such uncertainty as to depend upon the fickle, capricious, and perverse will of man. It supposes no effectual provision made for Christ to see of the travail of his soul in the salvation of sinners. Mr. T. has a very great objection to a sinner's coming to Christ with a *peradventure*, but it seems he has no objection to his Lord and Saviour coming into the world and laying down his life with no better security. Notwithstanding any provision made by his scheme, the Head of the church might have been without a single member, the King of Zion without a subject, and the Shepherd of Israel without any to constitute a flock. Satan might have triumphed for ever, and the mansions in glory have remained eternally unoccupied by the children of men."—(Fuller's Reply to Dan Taylor, quoted by Morris in Fuller's Memoirs, p. 287.)

A certain writer, animadverting upon this system, has these words:—"Take as much of the doctrine of absolute election as you can get, universal redemption all that is, federal conditionality without free-will as much as will suffice, and of these make up an evangelical confection. Men tell us, this being duly prepared, it will reconcile all differences between Arminians and Calvinists." But he afterwards adds his doubts whether the ingredients can be had; and if so, whether they will blend together. As to universal redemption, "I cannot yet be satisfied that there is such a drug in *Rerum Natura;* to me it seems such a thing as the pretended unicorn's horn, or the grand elixir of the philosophers."—(Chauncey's Examination of the Pacific Paper, 1692.)

be in direct opposition to the Scriptures, which uniformly speak of the intention and effect of the death of Christ in terms the most absolute and certain, so that it becomes of the same import to say, that Christ died for any of Adam's race, as to say, that such individuals shall certainly be saved. To this purport let the texts in the margin be considered.* The case, therefore, as it respects the application of redemption, or the certainty of the salvation of all for whom the Saviour died, is not left in any contingent, uncertain state, but is absolute, determinate, and perfect.

SECTION IV.

The same subject continued.

In confirmation of the particularity of redemption, it may be urged that the persons for whom the Saviour died are distinguished from the rest by appropriate epithets peculiar to themselves. The Redeemer of Israel says, "The good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. I am the good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold, [that is, of the Jews,] them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My

* Rom. v. 10; 1 Thess. v. 9, 10; John x. 28; Ps. cx. 1, 3; Acts v. 31.

Father, who gave them me, is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one." Now what is the plain import of the Saviour's own language? Can we enter fully into his meaning without admitting the doctrine of special and particular redemption? He died for the sheep, among both Jews and Gentiles; the sheep which, at the last day, he will set at his right hand as the purchase of his blood. All are not his sheep; nor are all brought to his flock and fold. There will be goats at the last day on his left hand. Surely these are not included in the number for whom he laid down his life. Those for whom he bled shall be brought or called, shall hear his voice, and follow him, and have eternal life.* "We gather from such declarations that for a portion of mankind—the sheep, the chosen—Christ died as a personal and actual substitute, thus laying the foundation of their certain salvation, and of the peculiar

* "The Shepherd and Bishop of our souls states the doctrine concerning his own death—'I lay down my life for my sheep; my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I *give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish,* neither shall any pluck them out of my hand,' (John x. 15—30.) These, his sheep, are the heirs of salvation,—the *many sons* whom Christ, as the Captain of their salvation, is to bring to glory, (Heb. ii. 10.) They constitute the church which Christ loved, and *for which he gave himself,* that he might sanctify and cleanse it, (Eph. v. 25, 26.) It is altogether contrary to scripture to consider the atonement as a general expedient for the redemption of all mankind, or to give them a chance for life, and not for the certain salvation of any. Christ did not die in vain, or at a mere uncertainty, whether any, and who, should be saved by his death. He had the divine promise that he should see his seed—that he should see the travail of his soul, and be satisfied, (Isaiah liii. 10, 11.)"—(New Evan. Mag. vol. vi. pp. 333, 334.)

administration of the Spirit by which it should be effected."*

Those for whom Jesus died are spoken of by the appellation of his church. The church of God is said to be purchased with his own blood. Hence the church of the First-born, whose names are written in heaven, are called a purchased possession. Jesus "loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." Does not the term church, for which Jesus died, sufficiently limit the results of his death? The word does not include all men without exception. There is now, and will be for ever, a distinction between the church and the unbelieving world. "Our Saviour hath obtained at the hands of his Father reconciliation and forgiveness of sins, not for the reprobate, but the elect only."†

Again, the redeemed are distinguished from others as being related to the Saviour. He is their near kinsman, and hence their Redeemer. They are described as the sons and children of God, which, by his sufferings, he designed to bring to glory. He calls them his brethren, saying, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee." "Behold I and the children which God hath given me." "Forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he

* Hinton's Theology, p. 174.

† *Usher*: Answer to exceptions taken against his Letter on Redemption. p. 19. Anno 1658. The term *reprobate* must be restrained to the worthless, as in 2 Cor. xiii. 5, 7.

also himself took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death,—that is, the devil,—and *deliver* them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Do not we learn hence that the many sons, for whom the Saviour died, were to be delivered from the devil, and from death, and to be brought to glory, as the very end of his dying for them? This perfectly accords with what we read elsewhere, "That Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation (the Jews) only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." If, then, the Redeemer's brethren, the children of God, are the objects of redeeming love, how can we conceive that redemption is universal? Electing love and adopting grace are of the same extent. "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love; having predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." Those persons, according to the apostle, who are elected and adopted into the family of God, are accepted in the beloved, and have redemption in his blood. All do not, all cannot, pretend to be the sons of God, or the brethren of Christ. It is a privilege peculiar to the elect, who are predestinated to be conformed to Him who is the first-born among many brethren. The eternal redemption, which Jesus has obtained by his blood, is therefore not universal, but restricted to the children of God.

"I consider," says Andrew Fuller, "particular redemption as merely a branch of election, or as the great design of election running through all the

works of God. In giving his Son to die, he kept this design in view. In sending his gospel, he does the same. Not that the one was in itself insufficient to atone for more, or the other to make more wise unto salvation than are so made; but all is applied according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will."*

Some urge the foreknowledge of the Saviour as an argument of the limited extent of redemption, and perhaps with reason, that he would not suffer for those whom he perfectly foreknew at the same time would never believe in him, but die in a state of enmity to him, and perish for ever.

The redeemed are described as the spouse and bride of Christ. "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom." "I will shew thee," said the angel, "the bride, the Lamb's wife; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready; and she was arrayed in fine linen, clean and white, for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." The justifying righteousness of Christ was put upon them, and the purifying influences of his Holy Spirit were experienced by them. Surely this indicates her interest in the death of Christ. The prophet says, "Thy Maker is thine husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. The God of the whole earth shall he be called." The Maker, the Husband, and Redeemer of the church is one and the same. But do all kiss the Son? are all presented as chaste virgins to Christ? are all betrothed unto him? Is not the real fact far otherwise? Many walk in the broad way of sin. Then all are not

* Fuller's Memoirs, by Morris, p. 408.

redeemed by him, only the people of God, the children that were given him, for whose sakes he sanctified himself, and who shall eventually "obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."

That any person may be represented by Christ in his death, and actually reap the benefits of his atonement, it is necessary that there be a relation subsisting between Jesus and the person or party so benefited. Where there is no union or relation there can be no transferrable result. If mankind had not sustained any relation to Adam, they could not have been injured or affected by his conduct; but, being connected with him as their natural and federal head, they are involved in all the consequences of his transgression. The sin of the angels could not have been imputed to man, nor the sin of man to angels, because there is no relationship or union between them.* It is only *as* being *in Adam* that *all die*, and *so* it is only *as* being *in Christ* that *all*, or any, shall be made alive. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned," in that one man. The apostle runs the parallel, both here (Rom. v.) and in the fifteenth of his first epistle to the Corinthians, between Adam and Christ, as two public persons, whose conduct should affect all those to whom they were allied or related, and whom they represented;—the former entailing death to all his relations; the latter, life to all connected with him. The question then is, Does Jesus stand in the relation of surety, substitute, or sponsor to all mankind, or only to the elect? If

* See First Part, chap. ii.

Jesus is not the federal head of all mankind, he cannot bear the sin of all mankind. Universal redemption cannot be maintained unless it can be proved that all were chosen in Christ; and that he represented, in his life and death, the whole of the human race. This I think impossible. As the High Priest of our profession, did he bear the names of all upon his breast-plate? Has he entered the most holy place, even heaven itself, to appear in the presence of God for every son and daughter of Adam? Is he the substitute for every sinner of mankind? Let that be proved, and then his death may be considered of the same extent. But we cannot conceive that he should represent more persons when hanging on the cross than he did in the covenant of grace, or than he does now when pleading before the throne of God. If the relation be confined and limited to the church, the sheep, the bride of Christ, or the objects of the Father's love, who were chosen in Christ, then redemption must be particular, and not universal. How can those be redeemed who were not in Christ and represented by him? They were not given to him for that purpose, nor are they called by him to his eternal kingdom and glory. To those whom Jesus represented, he is not only a head of government, but of influence. As Adam ruined all who were in connexion with him, and none else, so Jesus raises all to eternal life who are connected with him, and none else. "I give unto my sheep eternal life," and "because I live ye shall live also." Hence they are crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed. Hence he bore their iniquities in his own body on the tree; and was cut off, not for himself, but to confirm the covenant with many.

"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." Thus "he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." In the very nature of the case, Christ could not die for those whom he did not represent; and he could not represent those for whom he had not engaged in covenant, or, whom the Father had not given to him; and, therefore, as this was not the fact with respect to every son and daughter of Adam, the Redeemer did not die for all. Where there is no previous union, there can be no participation of blessings from Christ. If we are not chosen in him and blessed in him, how can we derive benefits from him? The idea of universal redemption must, therefore, fall to the ground, unless, indeed, we maintain universal election and universal salvation. These two are of the same extent, and redemption stands between them, and must be governed by them, or else the walls of the building will overhang the foundation, and also, in part, be uncovered by the roof. An attempt to redeem is not redemption. Can that which does not procure universal deliverance be universal redemption? Many remain unredeemed, and will so remain for ever. Conditional redemption is not complete redemption, unless the actual fulfilment of the condition be absolutely provided for. Christ never intended the actual redemption of all mankind; and certainly redemption did not extend beyond his intention.

SECTION V.

Particular Redemption reconcileable with the infinite value of the Atonement.

The principle here advocated is perfectly reconcileable with the infinite sufficiency of the Saviour's death. The one offence of the first man not only ruined all his posterity, but was sufficient to ruin as many more individuals, or as many worlds, had they been connected with him. There was nothing more than that first sin necessary to ruin as many worlds as there are men, provided those worlds had been represented by our father Adam. So the obedience and death of Jesus were sufficient to save ten thousand worlds, provided those worlds had been represented by him. Had they been chosen in Christ, he had been their surety or substitute. The limit of his death depends not upon the measure or the efficacy of his blood, or the worth or the sufficiency of his atonement, but upon the relation subsisting between him and those for whom he died. "The union between Christ and us," says Fuller, "though sufficiently close to afford a foundation for what we did to be reckoned *as if it were* his, and what he did and suffered *as if it were* ours; yet is not so intimate as for the actions of either to be those of the other."* He might have added, that actions are not capable of such a transfer. But it is enough to maintain that the relation is federal, and this relation must limit the effects and extent of the Saviour's death. Therefore we unite with Fuller in saying, that Christ "did not die with the intent

* Fuller's Memoirs, by Morris, p. 412.

that any others than those who were given him of the Father should not die." Christ, by reason of his relation to us, has taken away, not indeed our desert of punishment, but our obnoxiousness or liability to punishment. There is, therefore, now no condemnation to those for whom the Saviour died and rose again; and for whom, as for his own brethren, he intercedes in heaven. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?"

The doctrine of substitution, of imputation, and of satisfaction for sin by a vicarious sacrifice, are all involved in the atonement of Christ. Was he then, in his death, the substitute of all mankind? Were the sins of all the posterity of Adam imputed to him? Were they laid upon him, and did he bear them in his own body on the tree? Did he, the Just One, suffer for all the unjust that ever did, or ever shall, live? Has he made full and complete satisfaction for all the sins of all men? If he is not a universal substitute, and if all the sins of all men are not imputed to him, then he has not made satisfaction for the sins of all men; and, therefore, the doctrine of general and universal redemption is not the doctrine of the Bible.

SECTION VI.

Substitution, Imputation, and the Application of the Atonement.

To support the hypothesis of universal atonement, its advocates are compelled virtually to give up the substitution of Christ, and to deny his being in his death the representative of his people. They say,

in so many words, that he died without any special regard to any individuals, and that the great and grand design of his death was only so to atone for sin as to open an honourable way, in consistency with the divine perfections and government, for the exercise of mercy. This, I conceive, is renouncing a capital and fundamental doctrine of the gospel. Can it be reconciled with the law of sacrifices, either in the Old or New Testament? Let an appeal be made to the book of Leviticus in the former, and to the epistle to the Hebrews in the latter. The doctrine of substitution appears inseparably connected with sin-atoning sacrifices, whether typical or real. It is only on this principle we can account for the priest laying his hand on the head of the animal, and confessing over it the sin of the person or persons.* Thus the Lamb of God had the iniquities of his people laid upon him, as their substitute; and, as the scape-goat bore the sin away typically, so did Christ really.

If Christ did not obey the law actively in his life, and sustain the penalty of it in his death, in the character of a substitute, surety, and sponsor, for individuals of the human race, known to him by name and number, but merely made an atonement for sin in the bulk, will not such a statement directly confront the testimony and sense of the apostle where he runs the parallel between the first and second Adam? Was Adam the federal head and representative of his posterity, or did he merely sin so that the consequences might fall upon his posterity? Upon this plan, what becomes of the doctrine of imputation? Will it not, upon this sys-

* Lev. iv.

tem, be overthrown? If we deny the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, and the imputation of our sin to Christ, and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to his people, or to them who were represented by him, for whom he lived and laboured, suffered and died, shall we not set aside virtually the whole scheme of human redemption? The glory of the gospel is tarnished by the opinion; nay, we might write Ichabod, "the glory is departed." The apostle speaks of the first and last Adam as though they had been the only persons that had ever lived, because they represented mankind. "The first man is of the earth earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. The first Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam a quickening Spirit." By the first came death; by the second, the resurrection; for as in Adam all who were in him, and represented by him, die, even so in Christ shall all who are chosen in him, and represented by him, be made alive. Christ is risen to an immortal life as the first-fruits of them that sleep in him. They that are Christ's will, at his coming, rise by virtue of union to him. "Them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." Paul also teaches that these two—namely, Adam and Christ—have brought sin and righteousness, impurity and holiness, into our world. Here are two public persons, the one the figure of the other, whose conduct affects all they represent. One, by disobedience, brings sin, death, and condemnation to all his seed; the other, by his obedience, brings righteousness, life, and justification to all his seed. "By one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one,

Jesus Christ." As sin hath reigned unto death through one man's disobedience, even so hath grace reigned through righteousness unto eternal life by the obedience, sufferings, and death of Jesus Christ our Lord. Is not the parallel thus complete and perfect? Here are two public persons and representatives whose conduct affected all who were connected with or related to them. He who gives up the doctrine of the substitution for the purpose of extending the atonement, destroys the foundation to save the building. Only allow that Christ was a real substitute or surety for those for whom he died, and the controversy respecting the extent of the atonement is ended.

Those who maintain the universality of the atonement, and place "the particularity of redemption in the sovereign pleasure of God with regard to the application of the atonement—that is, with regard to the persons to whom it shall be applied,"—do not, I think, gain any advantage above those who maintain that Christ died only for the elect. Do the former say that the death or the atonement of Christ is of infinite value, and sufficient for all the world, if all the world believe? so say the latter. Do the former say they can invite all men without fear of any being disappointed? so say the latter. Those cannot mention any blessing or privilege which is laid open, in common to men, by the atonement of Christ, but these can also include the same. If those speak of the greater sin and condemnation of sinners who neglect the great salvation, who despise the Saviour, and wonder and perish, these also affirm the same things. If the former say that their system is more consistent than the other, the latter refuse to believe them, because they have not yet been favoured with

convincing proof. Do the former admit that more than the elect of God will avail themselves of the benefit of their general atonement, and be finally saved? Will any but those whom God makes willing, and whom he draws by almighty influence, ever come to the gospel feast, and partake of its rich provision? Let it be proved that one individual more than the elect of God will, by virtue of an universal atonement, be finally brought to glory, and I shall pause. But this, I presume, is not pretended. It is affirmed by an able writer, that "No man is really the better through Christ's having died for him," and that "the death of Christ, insulated and apart from other steps, has no efficacy whatever."* Does not this degrade our ideas of the work of Christ infinitely below the scripture standard? The death of the Redeemer, considered separately, has *no efficacy whatever*. What? Does it not *remove* guilt,—*bring* in a righteousness,—*procure* pardon,—*satisfy* divine justice,—and *secure* the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, and the conversion of those for whom he bled and died? "Christ also has once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that he might BRING US TO GOD." "He bore our sins, that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness;—by whose stripes ye were healed." "He died for us, that whether we wake or sleep we should live together with him." Do not these texts, as well as the whole tenor of the Bible, represent the death of Christ as *removing* the curse of the law from those for whom he died, and *securing* their conversion to God and their eternal glorification with Christ? This was the joy set before him when

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* Hinton's Harmony, p. 289.

he endured the cross. He shall see his seed, even the travail of his soul, and be satisfied. Does not Mr. Hinton allow that "Christ died for the elect for the purpose of their actual redemption, and, of course, for such a purpose for the elect only," and that his death "secures all that pertains to discriminating grace"?* Elsewhere the same author represents Christ in "the relation of a personal or actual substitute towards a specific number to secure the exercise of faith itself by forming a basis for the unsought communication of the Spirit."† Can these assertions be reconciled? Has the death of Christ, as a personal and actual substitute, which secures grace, and faith, and the Spirit, no efficacy in itself? Is no man *the better* through Christ's having died for him? Even Mr. Fuller allows that the death of Christ "made a provision of grace to *enable* a sinner to believe and to *excite* to a compliance."‡

The advocates of universal atonement, who maintain the doctrine of eternal and particular election, are obliged to acknowledge that the death of Christ was *intended* for the actual benefit and salvation of the elect exclusively. What advantage, then, do they possess over others in inviting sinners to the gospel feast? Do they not represent God as pressing those to come and eat whom he never *intended* to partake? What advantage arises from saying there is provision enough for all, when the Master of the feast has not in his heart ever *intended* any but a certain number to enjoy the rich repast? Thus the persons who maintain particular redemption are

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* Harmony, pp. 285, 286. † Theology, p. 174.
‡ Morris's Life of Fuller, p. 285.

no more guilty of charging God with insincerity than those who make the death of Christ to extend to all, and yet maintain that its saving benefits are restricted to the elect. I conclude, therefore, that the abettors of universal atonement, or redemption, do not, and cannot, pretend that one soul more will be saved, that God's glory is any more promoted, that the encouragement to sinners, or the holiness of saints, are more augmented by the sentiment of universal than by that of particular redemption. Maintaining election and the necessity of divine influence in conversion, they do not escape one of the pretended difficulties which they charge upon the restriction of the atonement to the elect, or chosen people of God.

CHAPTER II.

OBJECTIONS TO PARTICULAR REDEMPTION ANSWERED.

There is no doctrine of divine revelation but what has been opposed. It is no difficult matter to raise objections to any system, or to any truth. And it is not pretended that there are no difficulties, real or apparent, attendant on the point here advocated. But, in the writer's opinion, they are fewer and of less magnitude than are those connected with the contrary sentiment. Though he may not be able to refute objections to the satisfaction of opponents, yet, while he is better satisfied with this plan than with any other, he must give it the preference. He will not attempt to recount all the objections that have been urged against particular redemption, many of them being mere quibbles and sophisms, and founded only upon unconnected words and phrases taken from the Scriptures without any regard to the general design of the place from whence they are torn, and, as such, are undeserving of any reply; but whatever appears like reason or argument will be attended to with seriousness, prayer, and candour. I formerly most strenuously and sincerely defended the doctrine of universal redemption, and I am not conscious that any thing but the force of truth and conviction had any influence in the change of my opinion. I have, for many years, again and again examined and re-examined the subject, and have weighed the argu-

ments of the Arminians in behalf of universal redemption, and their objections against the views which the Calvinists have generally advocated; but I cannot, after all, consider their ground tenable.

SECTION I.

Authors against Particular Redemption quoted.

I AM aware that some persons called Calvinists, and even Calvin himself, have been referred to as maintaining the all-sufficiency of the atonement.* "Calvin," says Mr. Fuller, "appears to have considered the death of Christ as affording an offer of salvation to sinners without distinction, and the peculiar aspect which it bore to the elect as consisting in the sovereignty of its application, or in God's imparting faith and salvation through it to them rather than to others, as it was his design to do. To this effect is his comment on John iii. 16."†

The Synod of Dort has been appealed to on the same point. "The death of the Son of God is the only and most complete sacrifice and satisfaction for sins, of infinite value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world." "The reason why many who are called by the gospel do not repent, and believe in Christ, but perish in unbelief, is not through any defect or insufficiency in the sacrifice of Christ offered upon the cross, but through their own fault."‡

* The all-sufficiency of the atonement I have asserted, p. 268.
† Fuller's Six Letters to Dr. Ryland. Letter Fifth.
‡ Acta Synoda, Sess. 136, quoted by Fuller as above.

Owen, Edwards, Dwight, and Williams, have also been appealed to as maintaining the universality of Christ's death, but, at the same time, restricting the actual participation of the benefits flowing from it to the elect, or chosen people of God. Dr. Owen says, "Sufficient, we say, was the sacrifice of Christ for the redemption of the whole world, and for the expiation of all the sins of all and every man in the world. This sufficiency of his sacrifice hath a two-fold rise; first, the dignity of the person that did offer, and was offered; secondly, the greatness of the pain he endured, by which he was able to bear, and did undergo, the whole curse of the law, and wrath of God due to sin. And this sets forth the innate, real, true worth and value of the blood-shedding of Jesus Christ. This is its own true internal perfection and sufficiency. That it should be applied unto any, made a price for them, and become beneficial to them according to the worth that is in it, is external to it, and doth not arise from it, but merely depends upon the intention and will of God."*

Dr. Dwight contends that if the atonement, or amends, as he calls it, was sufficient for one sinner, it was sufficient for a world. "The atonement," he says, "was, by the infinite dignity and excellence of the Redeemer, rendered infinitely meritorious," and therefore "sufficient for all the apostate children of Adam." He contends that if Jesus suffered what those for whose sins he atoned deserved to suffer, his mediation did not lessen the evils of apostacy, "and nothing is gained by this wonderful work but the transfer of this misery from the guilty

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* Owen, as quoted by Fuller. Dialogues, pp. 236, 237.

to the innocent."* "If Christ has not made a sufficient atonement for others beside the elect, then his salvation is not offered to them at all, and they are not guilty for not receiving it." "The gospel, instead of being good news to them, is not addressed to them at all." "If no atonement has been made for their sins, they cannot believe, for to them Christ is in no sense a Saviour, and, therefore, not even a possible object of their faith."†

Dr. Williams maintains a twofold intention in God respecting the death of Christ. First, "the actual redemption or deliverance of God's chosen;" and the other, "to afford an adequate basis for the rectoral design of God in proposing Christ and his benefits to sinners in general, when addressed by the gospel call."

Mr. Fuller maintains the sufficiency of the death of Christ for the salvation of the whole world; and that "the particularity of redemption consists in the sovereign pleasure of God with regard to the application of the atonement, that is, with regard to the persons to whom it shall be applied." "If fewer had been saved than are, to be consistent with justice, it required to be by the same perfect atonement; and if more had been saved than are, even the whole human race, there needed no other." "That which is equally necessary for few as for many, must, in its own nature, be equally sufficient for many as for few, and could not proceed upon the

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* Vol. i. p. 450, 4to.

† These assertions of Dr. Dwight might lead to serious inquiry, whether the Lawgiver lessened the penalty of the law when it was endured by his Son? and, if he could mitigate the penalty, whether, on the same principle, he might not have remitted it altogether, and so have spared his only begotten Son?

principle of the sins of some being laid on Christ rather than others, any otherwise than as it was the *design* of the Father and the Son, through one all-sufficient medium, to pardon the elect while the rest are left to perish notwithstanding in their sins."*

There is much more in each of these writers on this subject, but chiefly to the same purpose. The sum of their argument is, "That the same atonement is necessary for one as for a world,—that the atonement of Christ is infinitely meritorious, and therefore sufficient for a world;—that if Christ died not for all, then the gospel cannot be good news for all, nor can invitation be given to all, and Christ is not an object for the faith of all; and, therefore, there can be no rejection of Christ, or of the gospel, or of salvation, and no increased guilt or misery for such a rejection."

* But probably it might be no easy task to reconcile Mr. Fuller in all parts of his writings with himself. Did he not, in his reply to Dan Taylor, fully prove the limitation of the design of Christ's death, by adverting to the promises made to Christ of the certain efficacy of his death,—the characters under which he died,—the effects ascribed to his death being such as do not terminate on all mankind,—the intercession of Christ founded on his death not extending to all,—the doctrine of personal and unconditional election as necessarily connected with a special design in his death,—and the character of the redeemed in the world above?† These arguments, followed out in all their bearings, will scarcely comport with the generalizing views of the death of Christ found in other places. Mr. Fuller, in the same work, says, "The provision made by the death of Christ is of two kinds,—a provision of pardon and acceptance for all believers; and a provision of grace to enable a sinner to believe. The first affords a *motive* for returning to God in Christ's name; the last excites to a *compliance* with that motive." ‡

† See Fuller's Memoirs, by Morris, p. 285. ‡ Ibid., p. 285.

It may safely be granted, and it has been admitted, that the death of Christ was as necessary for the salvation of one as for the salvation of many; and that the atonement made by Christ possesses infinite sufficiency. But this does not affect the question respecting the extent of the atonement with regard to the persons for whom the Saviour died. The universality of the invitations of the gospel, and the sinner's increased guilt for the rejection of them, are both admitted. I will state the objections in as strong a light as I can, and reply to them separately.

SECTION II.

An Objection to Particular Redemption stated and answered.

OBJECTION 1st. "If Christ did not die for all, how can the gospel consistently be preached to all? or the invitation to the feast be given to all?"

Certainly the gospel should be preached to every creature, and the invitations to the gospel feast be without limitation. But cannot this be done unless it be first proved or taken for granted that Christ died for every man? Is the extent of the atonement the measure of our duty? Are sinners under no obligation to believe the testimony of God unless the Redeemer has died for them? The general or particular extent of the atonement is not the ground of a sinner's right to come to God for pardon, but the free and unlimited invitation of God. And here there is no restriction. Whether men are elected or not, redeemed or not, does not at all affect the sinner's warrant and duty to apply for

mercy. Even if mercy was not tendered, the rebel ought to lay down his weapons. He may on the report of mercy do so with hope of pardon; but, mercy or no mercy, submission and confession, faith in the testimony of God, and obedience to the divine command, are his duty. Have ministers no authority to preach the gospel to every creature, and to invite all mankind to partake of the feast, till they can say, assuredly say, to every hearer, "Christ gave himself for you"? Surely it is the Saviour's command, and not the extent of the Saviour's death, that is our rule of duty in preaching the gospel. God has pointed out the persons to be warned, exhorted, and pressed to believe, and invited to the feast; and, upon his authority, we can assure all that come of a hearty welcome. We need not trouble ourselves who are redeemed any more than who are elected. God has made the feast, has given us our commission, and told us to bid as many as we find; yea, to go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in. It is our business to obey him. He has nowhere said, "Tell your hearers that my Son died for them, that he has made an atonement for their sins; that the universality of that atonement is the rule of your duty in preaching and the ground of responsibility to the hearers." This is to represent Jehovah as having acquired a right to the love, obedience, and belief of men by the death of his Son; as if unbelief could be no sin unless the death of Christ for the sinner made it so. "God might have required repentance of men, and have justly condemned them for final impenitence, supposing Christ had never died at all, or for any at all;" "and, as for the Jews and others, they will be condemned, not

for not believing that Christ died for them, or that he was their Saviour, but for the contempt of his gospel, and for their transgression of the law of God."*

An opponent will say, "Whatsoever all men are bound to believe is true. But all men are bound to believe that Christ died for all; therefore, that is true." This syllogism is false. For no man, as an unconverted man, is bound to believe that Christ died for him. A sinner, as such, has no evidence that Christ died for him, and a man is not required to believe without evidence. The gospel is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation—namely, "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." This is what we have to preach, and to preach to all indiscriminately, and call them to believe—what? that Christ died for them?—no; but the faithful saying that Christ came to save sinners,—this is worthy of all acceptation, to be embraced by all with all the heart,—this is good news, glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. Unto you men, said the angel, (not to *us*,) is born a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him,"—believeth what? that he died for every man? that he died for me? no; but believeth in him as the only able, willing, and sufficient Saviour, "shall not perish, but have eternal life." The same argument against preaching the gospel to all, and inviting all, because Christ did not die for all, would have the same weight if urged against the doctrine of election. For certainly it must be as consistent to preach to

* Dr. Gill's Cause of God and Truth, vol. ii. p. 48.

the unredeemed as to the non-elect. If men may not be called to believe the gospel unless they have an assurance that Christ died for them, they may surely, on the same principle, be excused till they know they are elected. For of what use is redemption if we are not elected to grace and glory? Why should those be invited to heaven for whom no kingdom is prepared?

The remark of Dr. Dwight, that if "Christ has not made a sufficient atonement for others besides the elect, then his salvation is not offered to them at all, and they are not guilty for not receiving it," is, I think, irrelevant. How far salvation can be said to be *offered* to sinners is rather difficult to decide. Are men damned for not receiving a blessing, or for disbelieving the testimony of God, or for both? It is in believing the divine testimony that the blessings of salvation are received and enjoyed; and, therefore, sinners are directly called to believe, and indirectly, as a consequence, to receive salvation.

The same objection would apply with respect to divine influence. Salvation consists as essentially in regeneration as redemption, and how can we call men to receive salvation for whom no salvation is provided? If regenerating grace is not given to all, or provided for all, then salvation is not provided; and, therefore, Dr. Dwight's argument, and indeed, for substance, the arguments of Calvin, Usher, Fuller, Williams, and all the rest, who lay the universality of the atonement as the ground of universal exhortation, and suppose we cannot properly preach the gospel to every creature, and invite every man to the gospel feast on any other foundation, entirely fall to the ground.

Mr. Fuller says, "It is a fact, that the Scriptures

rest the general invitations of the gospel upon the atonement of Christ."* Does Mr. Fuller mean, upon the *universality of the atonement;* and that if Jesus did not die for all, all could not be invited? If he does so, he takes that for granted which is first to be proved. And if he does not mean *that,* his argument is pointless, and proves nothing more than what is generally allowed by all parties,—namely, that if there had not been an atonement made, mankind had been left in the same state as fallen angels. I am aware he would reply, If the atonement is not universal, those who are not redeemed are precisely in the same state as fallen angels. But that is by no means the case. Every man here is addressed, and called upon to repent and believe the gospel, with a promise of salvation given by Him that cannot lie, but there is no call to fallen angels to believe, nor salvation promised upon their believing.

SECTION III.

A Second Objection answered.

OBJECTION 2nd. "Can God be sincere in pressing sinners to embrace salvation when no salvation is provided for them?"

This objection is often made, but it has more of appearance than reality,—more of show than weight. Much will depend upon the meaning of the phrase, *salvation provided* for them. Salvation is deliverance from evil. It includes, also, the possession of good, as pardon of sin, regeneration, holiness of

* Fuller's Memoirs, by Morris, p. 225.

heart and life, preservation in grace, and the enjoyment of eternal glory. How are these provided? Is deliverance provided for those who are not delivered, pardon for those who are not pardoned, holiness for those who are never sanctified, heaven for those who are never brought to glory, and salvation for those who are not saved but finally lost? It is not in this sense that salvation is provided; as if peace, purity, pardon, and heaven were prepared and ready for every individual of the human race; but, as has been already admitted, there is an infinite fulness of efficacy and worth in the work of Christ, which renders it a basis for general exhortation, without the idea of its numerical universality. "That Christ did not die for all, hinders none from believing, any more than (the supposition) that many of those he died for are not saved." This is revealed in the Scriptures of truth. Here, then, a sufficiency is provided for all who believe. God, therefore, can, consistently and sincerely, invite and press every one to look to him and be saved. Yet it is well understood, and cannot be denied, that none will accept the invitation till renewed. "Ye *will not* come to me." "No man *can* come unto me except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him." "All that the Father giveth me *shall* come to me." See here the invited, however pressed and entreated, will not come, cannot come, yet they shall come. He that makes the feast and gives the invitation, gives also the heart and the appetite, or none would partake. Cannot Jehovah be sincere in inviting those to the gospel feast whom he has not determined to make willing? If I invite friends, must I be charged with insincerity if I do not force them to come? or be taunted with the inquiry, "Is

there anything provided for us?" Or, shall I be told, that there is no provision made, and, therefore, they are tantalized. No, let them come and see. None have yet been turned away. All that have embraced the gospel call, have found all they could wish and desire. I can say to any sinner, without any hesitation or dismay, "Open thy mouth wide, and it shall be filled." "Oh, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the water and drink." "Him that cometh shall in no wise be cast out." "Look unto the Lord, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth."

It may not be improper to inquire of the generalizing Calvinists, on what ground they clear God from the charge of insincerity? Is not their hypothesis, that God never intended to apply the atonement to any but the elect, as open to the charge of insincerity, if any others are invited? "Shall God," it may be said, "press those to receive the salvation for whom it was never designed? Did God design that those should be finally saved who are eventually lost? If so, then he has failed to accomplish his purpose; and if not, how can he sincerely press those to embrace Christ, the atonement, and salvation, contrary to his secret intention." Happy is he that condemneth not himself in the thing which he alloweth. It rather increases the difficulty than otherwise, to say there is provision enough made, and you are warmly invited to partake, but God never *intended* that you should taste it. Let Mr. Hinton and others grapple with this difficulty, and remove it out of the way, before they utter strong speeches against those who maintain particular redemption and universal invitation.

SECTION IV.

A Third Objection answered.

Objection 3rd. "Can God be just in inflicting increased punishment on men for their rejection of that which in reality never existed?"*

The ground of a sinner's condemnation should be clearly defined. Surely it is not the want of redemption. Satan is condemned, not for the want of grace in God, nor for the want of redemption in Christ, but because he is a sinner. So men, independent of every other consideration, are condemned because they are sinners.* It must be ascertained what these sinners reject; whether that which they reject did, or did not, exist; and whether their rejection is sin. Now, that which they reject is the counsel of God, his testimony, the record he has given of his Son, and, I may add, the atonement itself. Now, do not these things exist? Mark, it is the testimony of God concerning the atonement of Christ which they reject, but not as if that atonement was made for all the world or was made for them individually. It is never presented to them as such, and, therefore, as such cannot be rejected. Jesus Christ has made an atonement, and he is revealed or set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood. This atonement, this propitiation, this Saviour, they reject. They go about to establish their own righteousness, and will not submit to the righteousness of God. They stumble at the stumbling-stone.

* The question whether the guilt and punishment of sinners are increased by their rejection of the gospel is discussed in the Third Part of this volume.

Cannot they reject the Saviour unless they are saved? Cannot they reject the atonement unless they are redeemed? The Saviour and the atonement do exist, not as *theirs*, but as God's bountiful provision. He sets them before us in the gospel, and invites us to embrace them. But he does not inform us that we are elected or redeemed, but that his Son is able to save to the uttermost those who come unto God by him, and that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. Men are condemned for not believing the testimony of God respecting his Son, for rejecting and neglecting the great salvation God has revealed. "All true faith must have truth for its foundation; and if faith is the belief of the truth, then whatever I believe ought to be as truth, and a truth supported by evidence, prior to, and independent of, my believing it. This is certainly the case respecting the excellency and all-sufficiency of Christ. He is what he is, whether I believe it or not. So if the persuasion I have of my interest in Christ have any right to the name of faith, it must be a truth, and a truth capable of being proved by scriptural evidence at the time."* This is sound speech, and cannot be condemned. On this principle we are not called to believe what God has not revealed; and, therefore, the sinner is not called to believe that Christ died *for him*, for that is not revealed. But if he is called to believe that Christ died for every son and every daughter of Adam, then is he called to believe, directly or indirectly, that he died for him, and that he has an interest in that blood which cleanseth from all sin,

* Fuller's Memoirs, by Morris, p. 162.

and by which sinners are justified. This is not a revealed fact. The revealed fact is, Christ came into the world to save sinners. This salvation effected by him does exist. Christ is the salvation of God. But Christ is rejected and despised of men; "and this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." If Christ had not come to them and been preached unto them, they had not had sin, not such kind of sin, their sin had not had such aggravating circumstances, but now they have no excuse or extenuation for their sin. The feast is made, the table stored with suitable provision, the invitation given, yea, they are pressed to come, by every consideration connected with their duty and happiness, with their souls and eternity; but, alas! they turn a deaf ear to every entreaty, and to every argument; and either beg to be excused, or say, without apology, "We cannot come; we will not have this man to reign over us. Depart from us." Thus, their rejection of Christ is as direct and positive as it could be, were they assured that Christ actually died for them in particular. Their increased punishment is not, however, for their not believing that Christ died *for them;* for they are nowhere informed he did so, nor called to believe it; but for their not believing the testimony of God, respecting the ability of Christ to save all who come to God by him. They call in question the veracity of God, and make him a liar, because they believe not the record he has given of his Son. Hence it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for them. Those who never heard of Christ cannot thus reject him. The clearer the revelation is,

which is given to any, the greater the guilt if it is not believed, and; consequently, the greater the punishment for the rejection.

SECTION V.

The Fourth Objection answered.

OBJECTION 4th. "Does not the restriction of redemption, or the death of Christ, to the elect, reflect on the goodness and love of God, and represent him as partial?"*

This objection, if it has any weight at all, will equally apply to any system that does not provide for the final restoration of all moral agents to the full enjoyment of God. If the fallen angels, for instance, are left without a Mediator and Redeemer, it may be said, but not proved, that this reflects on the goodness and love of God, and represents him as partial. But who will admit the conclusion? Irrespective of our opinions concerning the extent of the atonement, it is generally believed that all mankind are not redeemed, in the full sense of that word, not all delivered from the wrath to come, not rescued from the power and dominion of sin, not saved from the guilt of sin, the curse of the law, and the damnation of hell. And will the glorified in heaven reflect on the divine love and goodness of Jehovah, to which they owe their own salvation and glory, because the same love and goodness have not been exercised to rescue and save the whole and every individual of the human race? If this good-

* See Elisha Coles on God's Sovereignty, p. 221.

ness and love are restricted and limited in their operations any where between the divine purposes and the consummation of all things, as must be admitted unless all are restored, then the objection will apply with equal force to that limitation, as to a limitation of the redemption obtained by Christ. It will be acknowledged that election is particular, and that salvation is particular, with respect to their objects; and the application of the fruits and effects of the Saviour's death is particular; all are not made partakers of pardon, peace, and purity, through the shedding of his blood, and why then should his death be extended to those whom it was never designed to benefit? or, why should the limitation of it to those who were chosen in him, and are finally made partakers of redemption, any more reflect upon the goodness of God, than the doctrine of election, or the limited application of the atonement to the elect of God?*

* If particular redemption reflects on the love and goodness of God, might not the same be urged against restraining redemption to sinners of mankind, and not extending it to fallen angels? Are not devils as much the creatures of God as men? and are they not as guilty, sinful, impotent, and unable to help themselves, as fallen men? Why, then, should God limit redemption to man, and not extend it to devils? Would it not have been more consistent with his boundless love, goodness, and compassion, and abundantly more to his glory, to have made provision for the salvation of all his creatures who have rebelled against him?† He that accuseth God, let him answer it. Is it not lawful for Jehovah to do what he will with his own?

† See Dr. Gill: Cause of God and Truth, vol. ii. p. 60.

SECTION VI.

A Fifth Objection answered.

OBJECTION 5th. "Many texts of Scripture expressly assert universal redemption."

If that be the case, how comes it to pass that the doctrine is controverted? Surely its opponents will not withstand express revelation. And why is it that all are not redeemed? Redeemed they are not if any finally perish; for the redemption by Christ is eternal. If the death of Christ was designed to redeem all, and all are not redeemed; then the cause was not adequate to produce the effect.* The texts of scripture referred to on this subject shall be briefly examined. But previous to this, let one particular point be settled. Did the Israelites consider themselves exclusively the peculiar people of God? and did they denominate the rest of mankind *the world?* I presume they did. On these grounds, the writers of the New Testament frequently used the terms *world*, and the *whole world*, to signify the inhabitants of the earth exclusively of the Jewish people. The apostle Paul uses the terms *world* and *Gentiles* as synonymous, and in contradistinction to the Jews. He represents the fall of the Jews to be the riches of the world, or the riches of the Gentiles, and the casting away of the Jews to be the reconciling of the world.† Thus the Jews employed the terms in question, and restricted the means and the

* See the definition of redemption, in the First Part of this volume.

† Rom. xi. 12, 15, 25, 26. Let any one read the whole with a desire to be instructed, and then let him form his own opinion with respect to the latitude in which the term *world* is employed by inspired writers.

blessings of salvation to themselves. The apostle of the Gentiles acknowledges that "To them pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises: whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came." They had the advantage "much every way; chiefly because that unto them were committed the oracles of God." From these premises, the Jews concluded that the world, viz. other nations, were excluded from a participation of the blessings of Messiah's kingdom, and had neither part, nor lot, nor portion in the Son of Jesse. Hence nothing roused them to anger and opposition sooner than intimations of mercy or favour to the Gentiles. When the Saviour said, "Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me, and where I am thither ye cannot come," the Jews immediately said among themselves, "Whither will he go that we shall not find him?—will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?" The Jews at Nazareth, his own city, "where he had been brought up," attempted his life when he intimated mercy to the Gentiles. This prejudice had deep hold of the Jewish nation. The disciples themselves were under its influence, not only previous to the Saviour's death, but even after his resurrection. From this principle sprung the inquiry, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Even Peter, after the universal commission had been given to disciple all nations, to preach repentance and remission of sins to every creature, had yet to be persuaded, by visions and direct communications from heaven, to preach the gospel to the uncircumcised or unclean. And afterwards he had to en-

counter the reproofs of his fellow Christians and apostles for his conduct. They said, "Thou wentest into men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them." Peter, to justify himself, "rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them." "When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, 'Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.'" The conference at Jerusalem respecting circumcision originated from the same principle. This was "a good while" after the conversion of Cornelius; when Peter had again to rehearse the account of his visit to him, and to prove that God put no difference between the Jew and the Gentile. After him, James, in his speech upon the occasion, proves from the Old Testament (referring to the prophet Amos, ix. 11, 12,) the propriety of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul refers to this as a matter of importance, "which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto the holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit,—that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise by the gospel." Christ has broken the middle wall of partition, and has made peace between Jew and Gentile, as well as between God and man, and has reconciled "both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby." This subject would bear much enlargement; we should then see that a great proportion of the texts in the New Testament have a direct bearing upon the Jewish prejudices against the Gentiles. When Paul declared that God had sent him to the Gentiles, the multitude lifted up their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live;" and before Agrippa, when he said that Christ

"should shew light to the people and to the Gentiles," Festus said, with a loud voice, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." "When the Jews saw the multitudes" attending upon Paul's ministry at Antioch, "they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming."

As this principle was so deeply rooted in the Jewish creed, the Saviour and his apostles took every opportunity to oppose it, and to lead them to perceive that, "in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness shall be accepted." This will account, and, I think, justly, for the frequent use of terms of universality when, in strictness of speech, every individual of the human race is not included in them. This may seem a long digression, but the sentiment, I conceive, will serve as a key to open many texts which are frequently employed in this controversy. The New Testament cannot, in my opinion, be correctly or consistently expounded if this prepossession of the Jewish people be not in some measure acknowledged and followed as a guide.

SECTION VII.

Texts of Scripture supposed to favour Universal Redemption, examined.

THOSE texts of scripture relating to the death of Christ, in which the term *world* occurs, are frequently introduced to prove the universality of redemption. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son;" and he is the propitiation

"for the sins of the whole world;" "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." He is called in two places the Saviour of the world, and it is said that he "came not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." These texts, and others of a similar nature, are to be explained consistently with other parts of Holy Writ.* Now it is very evident that in other places the term *world*, and the phrase *whole world*, are used in a limited and restrained sense, and do not include every individual of the race of Adam, except, indeed, where the whole universe of God is intended. The sun, moon, and stars; birds, beasts, and fishes, are included when it is said God made the world. The world was made by him.. He was in the world—the habitable earth,—and the world, the whole universe, was made by him; and the world, the inhabitants of the earth, or mankind, knew him not. Even here, the term world, in the last clause of the verse, does not include all mankind, for some did know him and believe on him at that time, as the following verse declares; and many had done before he came, and millions since; so that the *world* is not a word of such universality as some suppose. The apostle John employs the phrase "the whole world" when he intends only a part of the human race;† and the Redeemer uses language of the same import when he says, "I pray for them; I pray not for the world."‡ The term is so vague and indeterminate

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* On texts produced to support universal redemption, or that Christ died for all, see the Sermons on Particular Redemption in the Lime-street Lectures.

† John v. 19. ‡ John xvii. 9, 23, 25.

that no stress ought to be laid upon it in the decision of the question under consideration.

"There went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that *all the world* should be taxed." This could not include more than the Roman empire and such states as were tributary to the Romans. The faith of the church at Rome was spoken of throughout the whole world. We cannot for one moment suppose that every inhabitant of the world, without limitation, was acquainted with the faith of the believers at Rome. It is said, "The truth of the gospel is in all the world, and bringeth forth fruit;" whereas it is known that many parts of the world were then, as many are now, destitute of the gospel. All the world wondered after the beast,—and Satan deceiveth the whole world. It is clear that, in these places, the terms cannot denote absolute and unlimited universality, because there were some that did not wonder after the beast. The extent of these terms must be chiefly determined by the context and the scope of the place. Where the death of Christ, and redemption by it, are spoken of, the sense must be determined by the connexion. "We are of God," says John, "and the whole world lieth in wickedness." John here speaks of himself and others who were not included in the *whole world*. The Redeemer says, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." "They are of the world,"—"we are of God." From these examples, we may learn that little stress can be laid upon a word or phrase of scripture, apart from the context, to settle a controverted doctrine. The

design of the speaker or writer is to be learned, not from detached words, but from a connected view of his whole discourse.

The text, "God so loved the world &c.," was spoken by our Lord in conversation with Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. He, like the rest of his nation, supposed the Gentiles should have no interest in the Messiah, but that he should be only the king of the Jews. The Redeemer, designing to correct his views upon this subject, as well as upon that of the new birth, gives him to understand that the love of God and the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom are not to be confined within such narrow limits. "God so loved the world," not the Jews only, but the Gentiles also, "that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth in him," though he be not an Israelite, and cannot claim relation to Abraham according to the flesh, yet he "shall not perish, but have everlasting life." For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, or the Gentile nations, but that the world, the Gentiles as well as the Jews, through him might be saved.

In the same manner we may explain the words, "He is the propitiation for our sins," who believe in him, "and not for ours only," but also for the sins of all that have believed, or do now believe, or ever shall believe in him, throughout the whole world.

"ATONEMENT," says Dr. Dwight, "in its original sense, always denotes some amends or satisfaction, with which the person injured ought reasonably to be contented, and to demand of the offender nothing more on account of his transgression." *

* Theology, Sermon 55, on the Atonement.

"PROPITIATION, that which atones for and covers our guilt, as the mercy-seat did the tables of the law. Jesus Christ is called the *propitiation* or *atonement;* his complete righteousness appeases his Father, and satisfies his law and justice for all our transgressions."*

"*Atonement,* or *propitiation,* signifies covering, and intimates that our offences are, by a proper atonement, covered from the avenging justice of God."†

The term *atonement,* when applied to sin, signifies to cover or to expiate it, to atone or make satisfaction for it. As it respects the sinner himself, it implies his being covered or protected from punishment. The Seventy render the word *propitiation.* The apostles make use of the very same term, and apply it expressly to Christ, (1 John ii. 2 ; iv. 10.)‡ This meaning of the word must either be denied, or the phrase *whole world* be understood with some limitation. Will not a denial of the former amount to a virtual renunciation of the doctrine of atonement, as taught both in the Old Testament and in the New? But the limitation of the phrase *whole world* is in perfect accordance with the whole Bible, and with matter of undeniable fact. It will not, I presume, be maintained by any sober mind that amends and satisfaction have been made for the sins of all men that have lived, do live, or ever shall live ; and that they are, therefore, covered and expiated, and that every person, without exception, is covered or protected from the avenging justice of God. We are obliged, therefore, to conclude that the *whole world*

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* Brown's Dictionary. † Ibid.

‡ Jones's Biblical Cyclopædia, Art. Atonement. See definition of terms in this Essay, Part. i.

cannot signify more than the persons who will be eventually saved. Christ is "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin," not only of the preserved of Israel, but also the sin "of the" whole "world." No sin is taken away but by Christ. He takes the sin from the sinner, he bears it in his own body on the tree, and he bears it away, as the scape-goat carried away the sins of Israel. And if Jesus take it away, it cannot remain; and if from the world, and the whole world, then the world, and the whole world, must be freed from it. "The Saviour appeared once in the end of the world to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." He need not repeat the offering. He has done it once for all. "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." He hath made an end of sin; if it is sought for, it cannot be found. He hath taken away the sin of the world, of the Gentiles as well as the Jews, of all for whom he died. Hence he is the Saviour of the world; not merely to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel, but also to be a light to the Gentiles, and the salvation of God to the ends of the earth.

The texts which have now been referred to as proving the universality of redemption by the words *world* and *whole world*, &c., I conclude have no bearing upon the question, neither for nor against the point in hand.*

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* The term *world*, as used by the Apostle John, admits of a variety of senses, and the context only can determine what is meant by it. It signifies the earth, the inhabitants of it, the unconverted—a number of persons, though not many in comparison; and he always restricts it to a part of mankind when speaking of redemption and salvation. And in this very text, the terms *whole world* are exclusive of, and opposed to, the writer, and those he compre-

SECTION VIII.

Other Texts on the same subject examined.

THERE are other texts resorted to in which the words *all* and *every* are considered evidence in favour of universal redemption. The language of the angel to the shepherds is considered in this light:—"Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to *all* people;" and also the words of the Saviour—"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw *all men* unto me." Paul says that Christ "gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time;" and, when writing to the Hebrews, he says of Christ, "that he, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man." The

hends in the pronoun *our*; so, in a similar text in the same epistle, John mentions a people beside the whole world. "We are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." The phrase, whenever it occurs in the Bible, in reference to redemption, is never used in its utmost latitude, but is always restricted to a part of mankind. In the event, Christ is a propitiation only for believers, for whom he is also an advocate with the Father, and not for the whole world, if every man and woman be included. "The word *propitiation* in scripture never extends to any but believers." Though the word *world* is used almost an hundred times by the apostle John, "yet I can find no more than nine places in all his writings in which the word *world* is applied to our redemption or salvation by Christ; and of these nine, there is not one text in which the word *world* can be proved to signify every person that has been, now is, or hereafter shall be in this world, which is yet absolutely necessary in order to prove by such a text that Christ gave himself to redeem all men and every man." (See Lime Street Lectures, 3rd edit., p. 349. Consult the Sermons on Particular Redemption, with respect to the texts employed in this controversy.)

text also, "If one died for all, then were all dead, and that he died for all," is introduced and thought to prove the universality of redemption.

When the Saviour speaks of drawing *all men* unto him, he surely did not mean to say that every individual of the human race without exception or limitation should eventually be saved. To be drawn to Christ is tobe quickened by divine influence, and made willing in the day of his power; it is to be enlightened to behold his suitableness and sufficiency as a Saviour, so as to be attracted and allured by his beauty. This is peculiar to the chosen of the Lord, the effect of eternal, discriminating love, and the efficient cause of our spiritual life, light, and salvation. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee." "I drew thee with the cords of a man, with the bands of love." Hence the believer says, "Draw me; we will run after thee." But are *all men*, in the fullest and unlimited sense of the words, thus drawn to embrace the Saviour? If so, none will be lost, none will be found at his left hand at the last day. Every man that is drawn by the Father, or is taught of God, cometh unto Christ, and Jesus will raise him up at the last day.

The words, therefore, must be understood with some limitation. He will draw, not Jews only, but all men; men out "of all nations and kindreds, and people and tongues; a great multitude, which no man can number." The good tidings of great joy shall be preached to all people, and no longer confined to the land of Judea; but all flesh shall see the salvation of God Persons of all states and conditions, of all ranks and circumstances, people

and realms of every tongue shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.

The same remarks will apply to Luke ii., that the birth of the Saviour should be matter of joy, not to the Jews only, but also to the Gentiles; and that all external distinctions, as to religious privileges, should for ever be done away. Hence the middle wall of partition is broken down, and peace is preached to them that were afar off, as well as to them that are nigh. Thus the incarnation of the Son of God becomes a matter of joy to all people. Not certainly to every individual of the human race, for "Herod, the king, when he heard these things, was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." And we know that to many, in all ages, Christ has been entirely unknown, and of course could not be a source of joy to them. To many he has been a stone of stumbling and rock of offence, and the preaching of the cross has been deemed folly, and has proved the savour of death unto death. We cannot, therefore, explain the words "all people" to signify the whole of the human race in the most unlimited sense, without doing violence to the analogy of faith, to the tenor of holy writ, and contradicting the most evident facts.

Christ gave himself a ransom for all sorts of men, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, kings and beggars, &c., to be testified in due time, viz. to be published in the gospel, and to be experienced in the hearts of the ransomed, at the time God, in his infinite wisdom and eternal counsel, appointed. Paul was ordained to teach this to the Gentiles, and that the middle wall of partition was broken down, and men might now in any place worship God without

any peculiar regard to Jerusalem or the temple. See the whole context (1 Tim. ii. 1 to 8, inclusive).

The advocates for the universality of the atonement lay great stress upon the words, that "Jesus, by the grace of God, should taste death for *every man*," (Heb. ii. 9.) But attention to the context will be sufficient to convince any unprejudiced mind that the word "every" cannot justly be extended to unlimited universality, but must be restrained to men of every description, Gentiles as well as Jews, rich and poor, the learned and the rude, kings and beggars, some of all classes. The connexion limits the subject to those who are finally saved,—the many sons who are brought to glory, (v. 10,) the sanctified, (v. 11,) the Redeemer's brethren, among whom he is the first born, (v. 12, Rom. viii. 29,) the church which he loved and purchased with his own blood, (v. 12, Eph. v. 26, 27, Acts xx. 28,) the children which were given him, which were scattered abroad, and which he will gather together in one, and present to the Father, without the loss of one, (Heb. ii. 13, 14, Isaiah viii. 18, John xi. 50—52.) Nothing, therefore, can be produced from this place in favour of the universal scheme; but if the text must be pressed into the controversy, it is directly in favour of the particularity of redemption. Whoever reads with an unbiassed mind from v. 6 to the end of the chapter, must be convinced that the Redeemer has power over all flesh to give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given him, (v. 7, 8, 9,) and that for those given he tasted death, to bring them to glory, (v. 9, 10,) as his brethren, the church, the sons and children for whose sake he assumed human nature, died on the cross, and

now lives in heaven, to deliver, succour, and to save with an everlasting salvation, (v. 10—18.)

The language of Paul to the Corinthians (2 Epistle v. 14, 15) is not at all conclusive in favour of universal redemption. There is no evidence that the apostle had any reference to the extent of the atonement, but merely to the *effect* of the Saviour's death. The love of Christ, manifested in his dying for us, and our love to him in return, constrain us to act as we do, though we be charged with madness on that account, (v. 13.) For we thus judge, "that if Jesus died for all," both Jews and Gentiles, "then were all dead," the Jews as well as the Gentiles, and the Gentiles as well as the Jews, for in this there is no difference, all having sinned and come short of the glory of God; "and that he died for all," the Gentile as well as the Jew, that they who live, by virtue of his death, should not live unto themselves, but unto him who was delivered for their offences, and was raised again for their justification. Therefore we know no man after the flesh any more. We put no destinction between the Jew and the Gentile, for if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; all *these old national distinctions and* prejudices between Jew and Gentile are done away, and behold all things are become new. Must not the phrase *all things* even here be restricted to *some things*? why then lay so much stress upon *all?* Henceforth there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all and in all. "For God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself," the Gentiles as well as the Jews, "not imputing their trespasses unto them, but laying their iniquity upon his beloved

Son, who has put it away by the sacrifice of himself. This place, therefore, makes nothing in support of the universal system.*

It is not a little surprising that the advocates for universal redemption should place so much stress upon single words and phrases. They cannot but be aware that the various erroneous systems which have been propagated in the world have been supported, not by the Scriptures taken as a whole, but by single texts and phrases and words, expounded apart from the context and the design of the writer. By this means the Bible is set against the Bible, and made to contradict itself, and to support the most contrary systems.

The terms "*all*" and "*every one*," now under consideration, are often confessedly used in a limited and restrained sense. As a specimen see the following places—Ex. ix. 6, 9, compared with v. 19, 21. In the former place, it is said, that *all* the cattle of Egypt died, but in the latter place we read of cattle in the field, and of the cattle being made to

* "But it is said, 'he died *for all*, gave himself a ransom *for all*, tasted death *for every man*,' &c. We freely admit this, but do not see that it militates in the least against the doctrine above stated. The term *all*, in these and many other passages of scripture, is used in opposition to the Jewish limitation, according to which they erroneously supposed that the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom were to be the exclusive property of the Jewish nation. The scriptural writers, when speaking of the blessings of salvation as extending to the Gentiles, mostly describe it in *indefinite* terms. For proof of this let the reader consult Ps. lxv. 2; Isai. xl. 5, lv. 5; Joel, ii. 28; Ps. xxii. 27; John, xii. 32; Luke, iii. 6; Ps. lxxxvi. 9, lxxii. 11, 17. These passages, with many others that might be adduced, express blessings which cannot be understood *universally*, though the terms used are of the most indefinite kind."—(New Evan. Mag., vol. 6, p. 334.)

flee into the houses, &c. Now certainly the word "*all*," then, cannot mean more than generally, or that *many* of the cattle of *all sorts* died. "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and *all* Judea, and *all* the region round about Jordan, (Matt. iii. 5.) Also Luke, vii. 29—"And *all* the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John." In the very next words, we are informed that, "the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him." It is plain, then, that the word *all*, on which so much stress is laid, does not mean all in the sense which is contended for. In Matthew, xxi. 26, it is said, "*All* hold John for a prophet." Query, Did the Pharisees and lawyers hold John for a prophet? (Luke, vii. 29.) "*All men* mused in their hearts whether John was the Christ." "John baptizeth, and *all men* come to him." Who would understand these passages upon the universal plan? Many others might be adduced, but let these suffice.

This part of the defence of particular redemption may be considered essentially defective if the strong remarks of an able and zealous author of the present day be entirely overlooked.

Mr. Hinton endeavours "to bring the provision of mercy into a universal bearing on mankind, by a reference to the following texts:—"God so loved the *world* as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." To this may be added the text which teaches us that Christ "gave himself a ransom *for all*." In a preceding verse, the apostle says, that God "will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

We are told elsewhere that Christ "tasted death for every man;" that, as "the Lamb of God," he "taketh away the sin of the world;" and that he is the propitiation "for the sins of the whole world."* These texts he considers as the "direct testimony of the divine word," to prove that "Christ did die for all men." He seems, however, to be conscious that, being detached from their connexion, they would not be likely to carry conviction to the mind of his reader, and therefore adds— "The ingenuity of theological disputation has rendered almost useless an appeal to the letter of scripture."† Mr. Hinton, it is hoped, will profit by his own remark, and carefully consult the context before he places too much stress upon insulated and detached passages of holy writ.

It is contended that our first parents were spared, and that their posterity are born and preserved, even in a course of rebellion against God, upon the ground of the atonement. "A dispensation of mercy, founded exclusively upon the revealed and anticipated sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ." "The very fact that a sinner lives is a proof that Christ died for him."

It would lead me beyond my design to reply to this argument at full length. Suffice it to say, that I view the death of Christ as the immediate or remote cause, the direct or indirect reason why the sentence against Adam was not immediately executed, and why his posterity are born, and the world continued. But I am not obliged to admit the conclusion, that therefore Christ died for every man.

* Harmony, pp. 271, 272. † Ibid.

Mr. Hinton, I suppose, will not deny the eternal decrees and wise arrangements of Jehovah. Was not the promise of eternal life given "before the world began"? Were not some of the human race blessed in Christ and chosen in him before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy and without blame before God, being so early predestinated to the adoption and heirship of children, and having grace given them in Christ before the world began? Are these appointments to be deranged and set aside by the sin of our first parents, or had God anticipated that event and made provision accordingly? Must not the elect be born and live, and be saved, or the decrees of God be broken? It is admitted that mercy could not be exercised consistently, but on the ground of an "anticipated sacrifice." But that sacrifice was appointed before Adam was formed, before sin was committed, and, upon the foreknowledge of Deity, was included in the divine plan. It may, therefore, be viewed, not as the first moving cause, but as the medium through which mercy is exercised, and sinners spared; or, if more satisfactory, it may be viewed as the meritorious cause of mercy to Adam and his posterity. But let it not be represented as a new plan to put man "upon a new trial, a fresh probation, another season of hope to be improved, instead of that which was lost;" as if God had been disappointed in the failure of one plan, and would therefore try another. Adam was spared, and men are born and preserved, through the death of Christ; but that is in consequence of electing love, and is not inconsistent with particular redemption.

Suppose Mr. Hinton is a chosen vessel afore prepared to glory, that his name is in the book of life,

that he was given to Christ, and that Jesus had died for him and satisfied all the claims of law and justice on his behalf, may not the atonement made for him be a remote cause why others are spared for his sake? Justice, on this ground, as well as mercy, demands his existence. Not only was he chosen, and a kingdom prepared for him, but he has been bought with a price. He must be born,—and if he must, so must his parents, and so all from whom he descended. This surely is the meaning of our Lord—"For the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." Can the parable of the tares be consistently expounded upon any other hypothesis? We cannot root up the tares but we shall root up the wheat also.* All things exist for the sake of the elect. When the last of God's chosen is meet for heaven the world will be destroyed.

I therefore allow that it is indirectly through the atonement of Christ, made for the elect, that men live, without admitting that the death of Christ was universally comprehensive.

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* See this parable explained at large in the Baptist Magazine for January, 1813.

CHAPTER III.

CONSEQUENCES FLOWING FROM THE UNIVERSAL SCHEME.

SECTION I.

Incongruities arising from the doctrine of the Universal Atonement.

THE universal scheme seems to me attended with some incongruities, and, I think, contradictions. It represents Jesus as giving his life a ransom for those who have never been favoured with the means of grace. How many nations under the former dispensation were suffered to live in ignorance of God! In Judah, God was known; his name was great in Israel; but that was a distinguishing mark of the divine favour. He dealt not so with other nations; and as for his judgments, they knew them not. Moses challenges the world to find a case parallel to the Jews. Under the gospel, how many countries and kingdoms have, for ages, been destitute of the word of life. Millions to this day have not so much as heard whether there be any Christ. Can it be supposed that the Redeemer gave his life a ransom for every individual of those nations to whom he has never vouchsafed the means of knowing him?*

This scheme, moreover, exhibits Christ as dying

* On this point, see Mann's Essay on the Atonement.

for those for whom he does not intercede. His intercession embraces those who were given him, that they may be with him. But were all given him? and will all, in the sense contended for, be with him for ever? Or shall his death be considered more extensive than his advocacy? Will he die for those for whom he will not intercede? For all he bought with his blood he appears and pleads in the presence of God, and his plea is founded upon his own sacrifice, (Heb. ix. 22, 26.) He intercedes for them that were given him of the Father, even all that shall receive his word, and believe on his name. Did he enter "into heaven itself to appear in the presence of God," as HIGH PRIEST, with his own blood, for the elect only, or for all mankind? Is he the FORERUNNER of all the human race, and will they all follow him? Is he gone to prepare a place for all? We know that the Father hears him always. He shall not plead in vain. If, then, his intercession extends to all, all will be saved; and if his intercession be limited, so must his death be limited to those who were given him of the Father, and of whom he will say, at the last day, "Behold here am I, and the children whom thou hast given me." For them I lived and laboured, bled and died; and here they are; and of all thou hast given me I have lost nothing.

Mr. Fuller, with all his fondness for the universality of the atonement, represents the Redeemer's intercession as particular and availing. "God is so well pleased with the obedience and death of his Son, that he gives him all he asks, and he asks our salvation." If God give him all he asks, either all are saved, or he asks not the salvation of all.

A general atonement, restricted in its application

to the elect by the sovereignty of God, inverts the order of our opinions respecting the displays of divine love. According to scripture, we have concluded that the gift of Christ was the richest—the unspeakable gift of God. God so loved the world. Herein is love—love that cannot be expressed. "God hath commended his love to us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

The breadth and length, the depth and height, of the love of Christ, manifested in laying down his life for us, are beyond all human comprehension. Angels, in the contemplation of this love, are filled with wonder and admiration. But if this love does not render the salvation of one sinner absolutely certain, but merely makes it possible upon the performance of certain conditions, then we must consider the gift of the Holy Spirit to apply the atonement a greater display of the love of God than the gift of his Son. On this principle, the work of the Son of God is a cipher until the Holy Spirit places the figure before it. The gift of the Holy Spirit thus takes the precedence. This does not appear to receive any countenance from the Bible. Not that we are to magnify one of these against the other, but, from the Old Testament and from the New, we have been led to conceive that Christ was God's first, best, and greatest gift to man, comprising virtually all the rest. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things,"—yes, even the Holy Spirit? "God's gift of his Son to die for us, is always considered as a blessing superior to any other conferred on his people."*

* See Hall's Help to Zion's Travellers, 2nd edit, p. 85.

SECTION II.

The same subject continued.

The system of universal redemption represents the blessed Saviour as shedding his blood for those who were at the same time suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. It will scarcely be supposed that all the generations from Adam to Christ were saved, and removed to glory when they left our world. Many of the antediluvians were swept away with a flood, and they are represented as "the world of the ungodly." The inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, and of the cities of the plain, were not all of them prepared for glory when the Lord rained fire and brimstone upon them. There were, we have every reason to believe, at the time the Saviour died, many spirits in the prison of eternal despair. Now, can it be thought consistent with the wisdom or equity of the divine Being, to appoint his Son to die for those who should, at the time of his death, be irrecoverably lost? Can it be thought even probable, that Jesus should bear in his own body on the tree the iniquities of those who were, at the time, beyond the reach of hope, and who were suffering the demerit of their own crimes in hell. If he is Judge of all, they had already appeared at his bar, and heard the sentence from his lips—"Depart, ye cursed;" and can he be supposed first to condemn the soul to everlasting misery, and then to die for its redemption? The case is the same with respect to those who are lost after the period of the Redeemer's death. With God there is no distinction of time. He sees the end from the beginning, and

from ancient times the things that are not yet done; and, therefore, all who will finally be lost, were lost in the prescience of God, as much as those who were consigned to endless torment before the Saviour's incarnation. "He calleth those things which be not as though they were." "Let all this be admitted," says an opponent, "it is merely saying that Christ died for those who are finally lost, who will not, through all the ages of eternity, reap any benefit from his death; nay, they will experience an aggravation of their sufferings, which they would never have known had he not died for them." On this principle, the sweetest joys of heaven, and the keenest pangs of hell, shall equally be derived from the same source. Does the Bible warrant such conclusions? I think not. But if this be not the sentiment contended for, I have misunderstood its advocates.

The universality of the atonement must either produce universal salvation, or, salvation must rest on some condition to be performed by the redeemed; a condition, the performance of which is not secured by the death of Christ. Some persons do not scruple to represent salvation as *conditional.* "This second dispensation is a new trial, a fresh probation." "Christ died for every man, to put every man in a state of *conditional* hope and salvation." "The effect of Christ's death is to put all men into a state of *conditional* hope." "Christ's death was *conditionally* intended" for every man.* If the death of Christ, then, does not secure salvation to its objects but upon certain conditions, and makes no provision for the fulfilment of those conditions, then salvation

* Hinton's Harmony, pp. 274, 275, &c.,—281.

is suspended upon terms to be performed by man.* The writer referred to says, "God is truly willing, upon the gracious terms he has proposed, to receive into his friendship every individual of mankind."† "Salvation is put into every man's power."‡ "From the connexion in which we have placed this doctrine (namely, the death of Christ), it will be apparent that we do not consider it as entering into the meritorious cause of salvation."§ This is certainly speaking out. Can such language be reconciled with the certain efficacy of the death of Christ, or with the doctrine of salvation by grace?

"General redemption and particular salvation necessarily suppose salvation to be conditional, and even then there is a manifest solecism or impropriety suggested in the divine conduct. Though Christ has redeemed all men, yet he has not seen meet to bless one-half of mankind with the gospel,—and where he sends his word, he does not bless it to one-half of them that hear it to their conversion, and we know that the word will not be effectual without his blessing."‖

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* "The death of Christ," says Dan Taylor, "provided a complete and free salvation for *all sinners without exception.*" Here are "two doctrinal principles wholly irreconcileable; viz., the universal extent of Christ's death, and the freeness of *divine* grace in justifying the ungodly. If Christ died alike for all the sinful race of Adam, either all mankind must be saved, *as the effect of his death*, or those who are actually saved must owe it to something else than Christ's death; in a word, their salvation cannot be entirely of grace, which, nevertheless, Mr. T. professes to maintain. He is here, therefore, on the horns of a dilemma!"—(See New Evan. Mag., vol. vi. p. 270.)

† Hinton's Theology, pp. 149, 150.

‡ Ibid. p. 140. § Page 174.

‖ Butterworth: Letter to a Minister.

SECTION III.

The same subject continued.

On the scheme now under consideration, how can it be said that Christ, by his death, spoiled principalities and powers, led captivity captive, and destroyed death, and him that had the power of death, that is the devil? The death of Christ, upon this plan, does not secure Satan's discomfiture. We are not indebted to that for conquest over him. For he may triumph still, notwithstanding the death of Christ. "I will have my way," says Satan. "The death of Christ cannot injure my kingdom. It does not render certain the loss of one single subject of mine. The love of God in the gift of his Son, however celebrated in the Scriptures, is no terror to me. It is the influence of the Spirit I dread; but that, however, though made possible, is not rendered certain by the death of Christ. Those may perish for whom he died." It is said of the martyrs, that they overcame by the blood of the Lamb; but the universal doctrine places no certain saving efficacy in that blood. His death, it is contended, is not the cause of salvation. We have believed that our sins were laid upon him, that he bore them in his own body on the tree, that he reconciled us to God by his death, that we are justified by his blood, and have redemption through it, even the forgiveness of sins; that pardon and peace are the fruits of his death, and that we are saved from wrath through him; and yet, after all, we are urged to believe that his death is not the cause of salvation, nor the conquest of Satan; that it does not lay a sure foundation for the triumph that the prey shall be taken

from the mighty, and the lawful captive delivered. It is not denied but that Jesus fulfilled the law, magnified it, and made it honourable; that he satisfied the claims of justice on the behalf of sinful men; yet it is maintained that all this does not render certain the salvation of any one individual of the human race. Is such a view of the death of Christ calculated to glorify him, or to encourage the poor, distressed, sin-burdened sinner to seek salvation through his blood?

On the universal hypothesis, every one may say, "Christ gave himself for me," and that previous to his regeneration, to repentance, and love to God. The drunkard, blasphemer, and infidel, may assure themselves, that, as certain as they are alive, they have an interest in Christ. "The very fact that they live," says Mr. Hinton, "is a proof that Christ died for them." The humble believer, with respect to assurance on this head, can say no more than the vilest reprobate. It will be acknowledged, however, that the real Christian has an enjoyment to which the sinner is a stranger; but if the sentiment be true, these comforts do not arise from a conviction that Jesus loved him and died for him, made an atonement for his sin, and removed the curse of the law from him, being made a curse in his room and stead; for this he might have known when he was dead in trespasses and in sins. No, his consolation must arise from some other source, in conjunction with the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. But certainly this is not the doctrine of the Bible, nor the language of the glorified in heaven. The happy spirits above unite in ascribing their salvation to the blood of the Lamb. "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us

unto God by thy blood." And again, they cry, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever!" These acknowledge their glory and felicity to be the result of redeeming blood. It is owing to a ransom paid that they are delivered from going down into the pit, and raised to glory. "The ransomed of the Lord SHALL RETURN, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Does not this text evidently suppose an inseparable connexion between the ransom paid for them, and their future glory? The RANSOMED shall come, shall obtain joy, and bid farewell to sorrow. The Redeemer shall see the travail of his soul and be satisfied. He died to bring them to God, and to Him they shall be brought. He reconciled them by his death, and will save them by his life. Did not Jesus, by his death, design the salvation of all those for whom he died? No, says the opponent, "He died for many whom he never designed to bring to glory. He designed, by his death, to secure the salvation of the elect, and this design will be effected. There are many of the travail of soul whom he never purposed to glorify." This hypothesis is, I conceive, totally unsupported by stubborn facts and by the word of God. Why should his blood be spilt for those whom he never intended to save?

Will any one undertake to prove that "the design of the Saviour," in reference to his death, "was more extensive than the design of the Spirit of God" with respect to its application? If Jesus was a vicarious sacrifice for every child of Adam, it can-

not reasonably be expected that the work of the Holy Spirit should be less extensive. This would suppose a want of co-operation between the Son and the Spirit, and prove that the Spirit did not approve "of the enlarged scheme of mercy drawn by the Son of God."*

SECTION IV.

Texts used to prove that those for whom Christ died may finally perish, considered.

If the Saviour's death does not secure the final safety of all for whom he died, then the purchase of his blood may be finally lost. Exactly so, says the advocate for universal redemption. For the scripture says, "Through thy knowledge shall thy weak brother perish for whom Christ died. Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died." And some are said "to deny the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction."†

* See Mann on the Atonement, 2nd edit., p. 142.

† Mr. Wesley says, "Christ not only died for those who are saved, but also for those that perish."—(*Sermon on Free Grace*, p. 20.) To this Mr. Whitefield replied, "You cannot make good the assertion without holding (as *Peter Boehler*, one of the *Moravian* brethren, in order to make out universal redemption, lately frankly confessed in a letter,) 'That all the damned souls would hereafter be brought out of hell.' I cannot think Mr. Wesley is thus minded. And yet, without this can be proved, universal redemption, taken in a literal sense, falls entirely to the ground. For how can all be universally redeemed if all are not finally saved?"—(Whitefield's Works, vol. iv. p. 71.)

The passover Lamb was designed for a special people. That Lamb was typical of Christ, as our passover sacrificed for us.

Whoever will read the first two texts with an unbiassed mind, desirous to ascertain the meaning of the apostle, will easily be convinced that the words *perish* and *destroy* have no reference whatever to eternal misery or everlasting destruction. In both places, the apostle is speaking of Christian sympathy and forbearance, of the stronger bearing the infirmities of the weaker, and avoiding as much as possible giving offence in matters which, in themselves, were indifferent. All things of that kind may be lawful, but not expedient; and, therefore, says Paul, "If meat make my brother to offend or to perish, I will eat no meat while the world standeth." "If thy brother," says he, "be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died." Offend him not, grieve him not, consider how much he is beloved by the Saviour. Christ died for him; and wilt not thou deny thyself a small gratification, a little personal liberty, for his comfort? Let not his consolations perish and wither through thy uncharitable conduct. Do not offend one of the least of those who believe in Christ.*

As the type was restricted to Israel, so the antetype to God's peculiar people.

"Infidels of all kinds are on your side of the question. Deists, Arians, Socinians, arraign God's sovereignty and stand up for *universal redemption.*"—(Whitefield's Works, vol. iv. p. 69.)

* "We are sometimes led astray by the mere sound of words without attending to their import in the connexion in which they stand. This is the case with the words *saved* and *lost.* Thus, in Rom. xiv. 15, 20—'*Destroy* not him with thy meat for whom Christ died,' &c. On this text we may be allowed to ask, Are we obliged to understand the apostle as referring to *eternal* destruction? Is it not plain that the destruction of which Paul treats

The other text (2 Peter, ii. 1) does not appear to have any reference to the death of Christ. We know the Lord Jesus bought *his people* with a price, and, therefore, they are under obligation to glorify him with their bodies and souls, which are his. They have been redeemed, not with corruptible things, but by the precious blood of Christ; of whom it is said, that he purchased the church of God with his own blood. But there is no evidence that this purchase is intended in the text under consideration.* The text does not relate to the subject, and it is a waste of time and pains to say all that may be said upon irrelevant texts pressed into the

in this text is restricted to that injury, hurt, or damage which stands opposed to edification? The same observations will apply to his second text, viz., 'Through thy knowledge shall the weak brother *perish* for whom Christ died.'—(1 Cor. viii.) The texts are exactly parallel, as must be obvious to an attentive reader of the two chapters, and the subject can need no farther comment."—(New Evan. Mag., vol. vi. p. 334.)

* The original word here rendered *Lord,* the critics say, is never applied to Christ in the New Testament; and Jude distinguishes it from that applied to Jesus. (Jude ii. 4.) It must, therefore, be interpreted, of God the Father, who bought the Jews. "Is he not thy Father who hath bought thee?"—(Deut. xxxii. 5.) This interpretation is borne out by Dr. Whitby himself, the great advocate of universal atonement. The text does not express or imply any thing relative to the sufferings or death of the Saviour, and, therefore, ought not to be pressed into this controversy.

A certain writer in the Evangelical Register for February, 1833, says, in reference to the point of universal atonement, "I do not perceive the pertinence of the passage in 2 Peter, ii. 1: The introduction of a parenthesis would render it plainer to the ordinary reader:—'But there were false prophets also among the people (even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies), even denying the Lord that bought them (i. e., the people), and bringing upon themselves (i. e., the false prophets) swift destruction.'"

controversy. And certainly that cause is greatly deficient of support that has to look to this passage either as a principal argument or an auxiliary.

Would there not be equal propriety in asserting universal pardon or forgiveness, universal justification and sanctification, as universal atonement or redemption? The connexion between the death of Christ and forgiveness and justification, appears, in the Scriptures, inseparable and indissoluble. We are pardoned through his blood, justified by his blood, the conscience is purged by his blood. He gave himself for us, that he might purify us to himself; that he might sanctify and cleanse us, and purge our consciences from dead works to serve the living and true God. We were crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed. I am crucified with Christ. In short, the Redeemer has, by one offering, for ever perfected them that are sanctified or set apart. May it not, therefore, be asserted, that pardon, and justification, and sanctification, are of the same extent with the atonement? They are as much affected by his blood as the atonement itself.

SECTION V.

Recapitulation.

It will appear from the preceding pages, that the objects of redemption are not angels, good or bad, but sinners of mankind. However sufficient and valuable the atonement may be considered simply in itself, it was not made, nor ever designed to be made, for any but the elect of God. The effects

are not general—none but the elect or believers participate in the blessings of redemption. If any die eternally for whom Christ died, then all for whom he died *may* perish, and his death, considered simply and alone, does not secure the salvation of one individual. But the Jewish sacrifices were offered for Israel only, and not for the nations. Their objects were specifically marked, and they were typical of Him who by one offering has for ever perfected them that were sanctified. The objects of the eternal redemption are also particularly specified as the sheep, the church, the bride, the kindred of the Redeemer. But these are epithets not belonging to all. There is a close relation between the Captain of salvation and the many sons to be brought to glory. He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all one, so that he is not ashamed to call them brethren. It was for the children of God that he assumed human nature, and lived and laboured, groaned and died. It is acknowledged that great names may be mentioned who have contended for the universality of the atonement, but it seems to have been for the purpose of justifying a general call to the unconverted to believe in Christ, which may be maintained upon other principles. The objections that, on the principle of particular redemption, the gospel cannot be preached to all,—that God cannot be sincere in his invitation to sinners, nor just in inflicting increased punishment for the rejection of Christ,—that it is contrary to the general goodness and love of God, and opposed to many express texts of scripture, are assertions that have been met and refuted. The terms of universality, so much insisted upon, must necessarily be understood in a restricted and limited sense. Be-

sides, it has been shewn, that there are many inconsistencies attending the universal scheme. On that plan, Christ gave his life a ransom for those whom he has never indulged with the means of grace; and that he died for them for whom he does not intercede, and for those who were in hopeless misery even at the time that he died for them. The universal scheme makes salvation either universal or conditional, and leaves Satan room for triumph, as he may still retain or detain in his service, and bring to final and universal ruin, those for whom the Saviour spilt his precious blood. Besides, on the plan here opposed, those who are living at enmity to God, may appropriate to themselves an interest in the death of Christ. These, with other considerations attending the opinion that Jesus Christ died for all, determine the mind of the writer to conclude that it is unscriptural, subversive of the "true grace of God," and consequently untenable.

PART III.

ON THE CONSISTENCY OF PARTICULAR REDEMPTION WITH THE UNIVERSAL INVITATIONS OF THE SCRIPTURES, AND WITH THE INCREASED GUILT AND MISERY OF THOSE WHO OBEY NOT THE GOSPEL OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

CHAPTER I.

PRINCIPLES GRANTED, AND THE JUST GROUND OF PUNISHMENT DEFINED.

THE discussion of this point demands great caution. The ground is tender, and the road narrow. There is danger of leaving the path either on the right hand or on the left. It may not be improper nor unwise, therefore, to mention two or three particulars in which persons who maintain and those who deny universal redemption are agreed.

SECTION I.

Principles granted.

BOTH parties will readily admit that some of the human race will finally perish. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, with all the nations that forget God. They all shall be damned who believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness.

They that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. Some are already set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Many will be cast into hell fire, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." The Judge of all will say, "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels." "These shall go away into everlasting punishment."

On the doctrine contained in these passages, the Arminian and Calvinist can have no controversy, both of them believing that many sinners die in impenitence and unbelief, and are therefore excluded from the kingdom of heaven; while they also believe in the reality, certainty, and perpetuity of the torments of hell.

It will also be admitted, by both parties, that there are different degrees of punishment in hell, as certainly as there are different degrees of sin and sinners among men. "Every one shall receive a just recompense of reward:" They that knew the Lord's will, and did it not, "shall be beaten with *many* stripes; while they that knew not the Lord's will and did it not shall be beaten with *few* stripes." It will therefore be more tolerable to some sinners in the day of judgment than for others. "They who despised Moses' law died without mercy, but of how much *sorer* punishment are they worthy who tread under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant, wherewith he (the Son of God) was sanctified, an unholy thing, and do despite unto the Spirit of Grace? As there are degrees of guilt

among men, greater and less sinners, there will, without doubt, be degrees of punishment and misery in hell. It is also granted that the Bible represents those persons to be the greatest sinners who have despised, rejected, or abused the greatest blessings. Guilt is proportioned to the number and magnitude of neglected privileges. Hence, greater will be the punishment of those who neglect the great salvation spoken by our Lord, than of those who disobeyed the word spoken only by angels. As the heavens are high above the earth, so far will the punishment of them who despise the gospel exceed that of them who only despised the law.

That some men will finally perish; that there will be different degrees of misery in a future state; and that those will experience the greatest punishment who have rejected and despised the clearest revelations of Divine mercy, I shall consider as indisputable truths. But many questions will be proposed by the advocates of universal redemption; as—how can God be just in condemning to greater misery those who reject Christ, if He never designed to save them, if no atonement was made for their sin, nor any provision for their salvation? How can they reject that which has no existence? or refuse or accept that provision which was never made? These and similar questions may appear plausible, and may be deemed by some persons unanswerable. Whether they can be answered on scriptural grounds, without admitting that Christ died for all, is the point to be examined. In the writer's opinion, redemption is restricted and limited to the elect. The Captain of our salvation tasted death for men of every name and nation, that he might bring the *many* sons to glory whom the Father had given him. He died for the

children of God that were scattered abroad. Hence they are said to be redeemed from among men, *out* of every nation. He laid down his life for the *sheep*. He loved the *church*, and gave himself for *it*, that he might sanctify and cleanse it. They are *his people* that he saves from their sins. All (used in the most extensive sense) are not his sheep, his church, his people; all are not sanctified and cleansed, nor redeemed from the curse of the law by his precious blood, nor saved from wrath through him. All are not justified by his blood, nor reconciled unto God, as those are for whom he died. These are freed from every charge. "For who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that has risen again." Those for whom God bruised his Son have all things else secured to them, for life and godliness, for time and eternity. If Christ had made an atonement and satisfied the claims of Divine justice for all the sins of all men, without exception, there could no charge have been brought against any, and therefore none of the sons of Adam could be finally lost.

It is now proposed to shew that the particularity of the atonement is not inconsistent with the universal invitation of the gospel, nor with the increased guilt and misery of those who "neglect so great salvation." I hope to make it appear that it will be just in God to inflict greater punishment upon those who reject the gospel, though the Redeemer did not die for their salvation, than upon those who never enjoyed divine revelation.

Some persons say that "the sentiment of particular redemption represents God as a respecter of

persons, as partial and unfair in the distribution of his favours, and arbitrary and unjust in his threatenings and reprehensions." On this principle, it is asked, "Why doth he yet find fault?" Surely the Lord will not charge those for whom no atonement is made with neglecting the great salvation, and denying and despising the only Saviour, when neither Saviour nor salvation was provided for them.

Laying aside all human traditions and prereceived opinions, let us, with all humility and calmness, in the fear of God, and by the light of his holy word, proceed to examine this important subject. May the Holy Spirit, without whose aid we are ever liable to err from the truth, assist our meditation!

SECTION II.

The just ground of Punishment defined.

Just and scriptural views of the real ground of a sinner's condemnation before God are highly desirable and necessary. Erroneous opinions on this point will lead to wrong conclusions on the subject under discussion. We should clearly perceive what is not, as well as what is, the ground of condemnation and punishment.

It is freely confessed and avowed, that there would be just ground of complaint against the Divine proceedings, if God condemned men to endless misery *because* they were not of the number of his elect. This would make their misery independent of their own conduct or choice, and irrespective of holiness or sin, virtue or vice, and thus render null and void both their free agency and accountability; while it would ascribe their everlasting punishment

to an arbitrary degree of God, amounting to the horrible anti-scriptural doctrine of eternal, unconditional reprobation.

The language in the ninth chapter of Romans, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," will not support that doctrine. This no more means an absolute and real hatred, than does the direction of our Lord to hate our father, mother, wife, child, houses, land, and our own life. We are not to love these objects as we love Christ, so God did not love Esau as he loved Jacob.—(Mal. i. 1, 2.) Jacob is said to hate Leah in comparison of Rachel. But it would be an approach to blasphemy to say, or even to suppose, that God absolutely hates the non-elect irrespective of their sins, and consigns them over to endless perdition by an eternal act of his own arbitrary will. To whatever cause the condemnation of a sinner is ascribed, it is nowhere attributed, directly or indirectly, to non-election; nor is any blame attached to any person on that ground, any more than attaches to those persons of a corporation who are not elected to the office of alderman or mayor. It is also allowed that there would be ground of complaint if God condemned men *because* they were not included in the number of those for whom Christ died.

The death of Christ secures the salvation of many, but the damnation of none. It does not, in any sense whatever, cause the sin or the misery of any man. Paying the debts of one does not cause another to become insolvent. If a person becomes a substitute for a condemned criminal, and suffers in his stead, it surely cannot be the cause why another equally guilty, for whom he was not a substitute, should be condemned. It is not the absence

of redemption, but the existence of guilt, that is the ground of a sinner's condemnation.

It might be thought hard if men were condemned *because* God had not quickened them, called them from darkness into marvellous light, and made them new creatures in Christ Jesus. The Bible does not anywhere represent man as deserving to perish because he is not made a partaker of the Holy Spirit. God's withholding his renewing, converting influence from him is not the cause of his misery. My withholding bounty from the beggar is not the *cause* of his poverty. God's grace saves some, but the absence of it is not the *cause* of the damnation of any.

Election, redemption, and regeneration are the works of God. They are ascribed to him exclusively in the sacred Scriptures, and it is cheerfully acknowledged that salvation is not only intimately connected with them, but absolutely dependent upon them, as the effect upon the cause. But causes or branches of salvation cannot be causes or grounds of damnation, no more than light can be the cause of darkness. Damnation and salvation spring from very different and even opposite causes. The latter from the love of God, the former from the sin of the creature. Nothing can be the real cause of our condemnation that is not the fruit of our own choice. But election, redemption, and divine influence are not the fruits of our choice, nor under our control to produce or prevent either by our contrivance or conduct, and therefore can never be the ground of blame or punishment. It would be every way as reasonable and scriptural to consign men to eternal misery because they are not as strong as Sampson,

or as wise as Solomon, as to condemn them to endless flames because they are not elected, redeemed, and quickened. No more guilt attaches to a man for not being elected or redeemed, than for his not touching the moon with his head, or not covering the sun with the palm of his hand. Moreover, some men would think they had a right to complain if they were condemned, *because* God had elected, redeemed, and quickened others. This, however, is not the case. The sinner's transgression and sufferings are not attributable to any act of God, but exclusively to the sinner himself.

When two persons are equally guilty, the pardon of one is not the ground of the condemnation of the other. No; it is his own crime that subjects him to punishment. So it is not the choice of some to everlasting life, or their deliverance from the wrath to come, that is the ground of the condemnation of others, but their own sin in transgressing the divine law, and rejecting the only remedy published in the gospel. The election and redemption of others, and their non-election and non-redemption, will never be produced as their crime, nor assigned as a cause of their final separation from God. Death is the wages of sin. Israel has destroyed himself.

In reply to the preceding remarks, it will be said that, "though man is not condemned because he is not elected and redeemed, yet if no provision is made for his salvation, there is no ground for his faith, and he has no chance of escaping eternal death." This reasoning supposes that God cannot be just in the condemnation of sinners unless his Son had died for them; and would, if admitted, overturn our ideas both of the law of God, and of his grace.

It would overturn our ideas of the law of God, because it releases the sinner from his duty to believe God, and from his obligation to punishment, unless God provide a Saviour for him. That man is a sinner cannot be denied. May not the righteous penalty of the law be justly executed upon him?

Dan Taylor appears to have maintained that man was so reduced by the fall as to be really and totally unable to do good; that if he had been left in this condition, he would not have been to blame for not doing it,—his inability would have been his excuse; but God has not left him in this condition. He has sent his Son to die for all men universally, and he gives or offers grace to all men, and so removes the inability which they derived from the fall; and from hence they become accountable beings, and are inexcusable if they do not comply with spiritual requirements.

On these principles it will follow, that Christ did not die for the *sins* of any man except it were Adam, since none of the fallen race could have *sinned*, if he had never died. This is to make the death of Christ and the grace of the gospel the ground of man's iniquity and guilt, for man had had no capacity to sin if Jesus had not died. But cannot men be chargeable with sin or blameworthiness independently of the death of Christ?* It is written, "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law, to do them." "What things the law saith it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world become guilty before God." But notwith-

* See Memoirs of Fuller, by Morris, pp. 282, 283.

standing man's guilt, and his exposedness to wrath, the law, according to the above statement, cannot take effect unless Jehovah will first give his Son to die for the sinner. If God is bound, either to provide a remedy for the sinner, or to let him go unpunished, the law is deprived of its power, and made of no effect; and, what is really astonishing, it is rendered impotent to command faith or to curse for unbelief by means of the sinner's violation of it. Other laws take their course when transgressed, and the penalty is inflicted, and this is considered just and equitable; but God, it seems, must not, cannot punish the transgressor of his law, except he first produce a surety for the transgressor, to make an atonement for him. The law is of no effect, and its requisitions must be unreasonable, if a failure in point of duty bind God to sacrifice his Son on the sinner's behalf, before he can justly condemn him for his crimes.

This sentiment will be found farther to overturn our ideas of divine grace, as reigning in the salvation of sinners. The death of Christ is always represented in the Scriptures, as the fruit of God's amazing love to mankind, and an act of pure sovereignty, displaying the unsearchable riches of free and undeserved grace. But on the principles now mentioned, it is an act of mere justice, without which God could not righteously execute the sentence of his law upon its transgressors. It is asked, "How can God be just in condemning those for whom the Saviour did not die, and for whose salvation no provision is made?" As if a judge could not enforce the execution of the law unless he first provided for the pardon of the criminal. The death of Christ, then, is an act of justice due to the sinner before

God can equitably condemn him for his sin. From such a statement it unavoidably follows, that the death of Christ is, one way or other, the cause of damnation; for if Christ had not died, no sinner could have been equitably condemned. How absurd the idea, alike contrary to reason, to the daily proceedings of men in courts of law, and to the whole tenor of divine revelation! The death of Christ was necessary to the salvation of men. "It *became* him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." But who will assert that the Saviour's death was necessary to the damnation of men? Surely, the Lawgiver of heaven and earth would have been perfectly righteous if he had dealt with all the sinners of mankind as he dealt with the angels who kept not their first estate, and had executed judgments against our evil works, and consigned us all to the regions of despair.* "Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? I speak as a man, for how then shall God judge the world?" That the rejection of the atonement will augment the guilt and punishment of the sinner is freely acknowledged; but to represent the death of Christ for sinners as necessary to their righteous condemnation, is at once to overturn our conceptions of the equity of the divine law, and the glory and sovereignty of divine grace. "I will ascribe righteousness unto my Maker. Let God be just, and every man a liar."

* Had the sentence been executed upon Adam immediately upon his disobedience, his posterity had never been born. In reference to this point, see Part ii. chap. ii. sec. 8.

SECTION III.

Unbelief, the principal ground of Condemnation.

I CONSIDER that the two following particulars are clearly revealed in the pages of inspiration:—

1. That the ground of a sinner's condemnation is sin. "The wages of sin is death. The soul that sinneth it shall die. They that commit sin are worthy of death." This was the *ground* of condemnation to Adam, and it remains the sole, the *exclusive ground* of condemnation to his descendants. No man has ever been condemned to endless misery but on the ground of his own personal rebellion against his Maker. But if sin is a transgression of the law, and the only ground of condemnation, what shall we say with respect to unbelief, which is represented in the New Testament as a principal, if not the only ground of a sinner's condemnation? We must, and we ought to say, that unbelief is a sin,—that it is a transgression of God's righteous and unchanging law. The first sin of Adam consisted chiefly in unbelief; and unbelief has been the root and the source of the sin of all those who have been favoured with the oracles of God. The fuller and clearer the revelation, the greater is the sin of unbelief. This made the Israelites so exceedingly criminal in the wilderness. They had sensible and clear revelations from God, and had them confirmed by undoubted miracles, miracles by which they were daily fed, and yet disbelieved Jehovah, and were, as they justly deserved to be, excluded from the promised land. "So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."

Unbelief is a breach of the moral law; which

law, arising from the nature of things, necessarily requires man to believe whatever God may at any time reveal. We cannot for a moment suppose that any rational creature can be left at liberty, so that he may disbelieve the testimony of God, without guilt. The very nature of God renders it impossible for him to lie; and, as his creatures, we are dependent upon him, and under every obligation to love him with all our heart. But he cannot be deserving of our love if he is not worthy of our credit; nor can any man love God, as he ought to do, who does not believe him. Faith in the veracity of God, and in the infallibility of his testimony, is essential to the existence of holy affection towards him. "Faith worketh by love." Thus, faith is binding upon all proportionable to the revelation from God with which they are favoured. Hence, unbelief is represented as the sin most dishonourable and displeasing to the Supreme Being of all others. "He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son." Against this sin only has God pledged his oath. "To whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?" No sin can ruin us, if we are not guilty of unbelief. "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved," whatever sins he may have committed, but "he that believeth not shall be damned." Sin, therefore, is the general and the principal ground of a sinner's final condemnation.*

2. That a sinner's condemnation, on the ground of his unbelief, is increased or aggravated in pro-

* On the *Nature* and *Sin* of Unbelief—see Letters on the Duty of Man.

portion to the magnitude or number of abused privileges. Those that had not the means of knowing the will of God, though they perished, will be beaten with comparatively few stripes; while those who had the means of knowing the will of God, and neglected them, will be beaten with many stripes. It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for those who have been favoured with the gospel and have rejected it. Those sinners that perish in our day and in our land, under the preaching of the gospel, will meet a greater damnation, and find a deeper hell, than those who never heard of Christ. "If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord?" The sin of the latter is greater than the sin of the former, in the same proportion as the heavens are higher than the earth, and as Jesus Christ is superior in nature and dignity to Moses and the angels. "If they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, how shall those escape who refuse him that speaketh from heaven?" "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy; of how much *sorer* punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath despised the gospel of the Son of God?" The sin of those who despise the gospel is aggravated exceedingly far above that of those who lived under the law. We are invited in the most winning and pressing manner to embrace the gospel. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money, and without price. Wherefore do ye spend

your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." "Come unto me, ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; and him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out." "All things are ready, come to the marriage. Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in." These are but a specimen of the delightful invitations which are given to poor sinners in the gospel, whereby they are warranted to come to Christ, for life and salvation. They are not only permitted, but commanded to come; not only invited, but pressed with every possible argument. The joys of heaven and the terrors of hell; the value of the soul and the importance of eternity; the threatenings of the law and the blessings of the gospel, are urged as motives to move sinners to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life. They are entreated and besought, by the ministers of the word, to accept the blessings of heaven. When men make light of the invitations of the gospel, refuse to listen when God calls, turn a deaf ear to the voice of the charmer, receive the grace of God in vain, and reject his counsel against themselves, though warned and threatened by the word, by providence, by friends, and by the voice of conscience, they must certainly be unspeakably criminal in the sight of Jehovah. These things increase their guilt, and, of course, aggravate their future misery. The gospel becomes to them the savour of death unto death.

CHAPTER II.

GOD IS JUST IN CONDEMNING THOSE SINNERS FOR WHOM NO ATONEMENT IS MADE.

WHATEVER views we may form of the doctrines of the gospel, we have the most undeniable grounds to believe that the Judge of all the earth will do right. He will not punish man more than is meet, nor exceed a just recompence of reward. He will be clear when he judgeth ; and every mouth will be stopped, or only opened to acknowledge the righteousness of the sentence. "He will judge the world in righteousness, and the people with his truth." But here, then, the important question recurs,—*If Christ did not make an atonement for the sins of every son and daughter of Adam, how can God sincerely invite sinners to come to Christ, or punish them with increased misery for their refusal to come?*

To meet this inquiry, I shall endeavour to answer the following questions :—

How can God be just in the condemnation of those persons for whom no atonement has been made?

How can the rejection of the gospel justly increase the punishment of those for whom the Saviour did not die?

How can God be sincere in his invitations to those sinners for whose salvation no provision is made?

Let us attend to each of these questions separately.

QUESTION 1. *How can* GOD *be* JUST *in condemning those persons for whom* NO ATONEMENT *has been made?*

In reply, it may be asked, Can God be just in the condemnation of those for whom *an atonement is made?* The apostle grounds his challenge of freedom from every charge upon the Saviour's death. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again." By his resurrection, proof is given that his death was satisfactory—that his sacrifice was accepted—that God was well pleased—that the consequences of sin were ended, and that the curse was removed from all them whose sins he sustained and expiated. "He was delivered for our offences, and rose again for our justification." The redeemed are freed from the curse of the law, Christ himself having been made a curse for them. It may, therefore, be asked again, "Whether God can justly condemn those for whom *an atonement is made,* by which their sins are covered and taken away?" If he can, what assurance is there of the salvation of any of the sons of men? But is not the other question as absurd in its import, as to suppose that the debtor cannot be committed to prison unless his debt is first paid? In order to set this matter in a clear light, let us proceed by easy gradations.

SECTION I.

Sin has entered our world by divine permission.

CERTAINLY, God could have prevented the existence of sin, had he been pleased to do so; and when it

did exist in angels, he could have prevented its introduction into our world. Some have asked, "Why did God make man, especially since he knew he would sin? Why did he not leave him in the empty womb of nothing? then he had not been capable of sinning here and of suffering hereafter." It may be replied, How could we speak of man if he had not been? In that case, there had been *no man* to judge or speak. The very language of a nonentity being capable or incapable of anything is absurd. "But who art thou, O man, that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" This is altogether beside the question, if not directly contrary to scripture. God was not bound to create man; and if he did create him, he was not bound to preserve him. That would have superseded man's accountability. "God," says an ancient author, "is neither the willer nor author of sin. Yet sin could not be if God would hinder it."*

"The divine power could have preserved man in his integrity by laying a restraint on the apostate angels, that they should never have made an attempt upon him; or, by keeping his understanding, and fortifying his will, and rendering that impenetrable without any prejudice to his freedom. "Thus, in the glorified spirits above, by the full and constant light of the mind, the will is indeclinably fixed upon its supreme good, and this is its crown and perfection."† To deny this, is to adopt atheism, and overthrow the existence of Deity. It is essential to the idea of an Almighty Creator, that he has an

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* Burgess on Justification, part ii. p. 39.

† Bates's Harmony, p. 41

absolute and universal government over all his creatures. His dominion is unlimited, and his power uncontrollable, and "he does according to his pleasure in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: none can stay his hand, or say to him, What doest thou?" We strongly assert, that God interposed not in the production of sin, directly or indirectly. It would amount nearly, if not wholly, to blasphemy, to charge God with being its author.* But still we affirm, that God could, if he would, have prevented its existence, or else, it exists whether he will or not; and if he could not at the first have prevented it, it will follow that he cannot remove or destroy it, however desirous he may be to do so; and, therefore, as it came without his permission, it will continue without his leave, in despite of all the perfections of Deity. It is concluded, therefore, that sin entered our world by divine permission.

Did God, in *permitting sin*, when he had power to hinder it, *act unjustly?* Had he not a right to suffer moral evil to pervade his creation, and to deface his moral image in angels and men?† If he had not this right, his creatures have ground for complaint. But to suppose the contrary, will involve dangerous and awful consequences. It will not only arraign Jehovah at the bar of his creatures, and charge him with evil, and require an account of his conduct, but it will even deny his right of creating

* See Essay I., On the Extent of the Divine Decrees.

† The permission of sin does not reflect on the divine purity or providence, nor disparage the divine goodness.—(See these points proved by Dr. Bates, in his Harmony of the Divine Attributes, pp. 42, 44.)

moral and accountable agents, or of giving existence to such beings as angels and men; and, by just consequence, infer that he had no right to create such a world as that in which we live. On this principle, he must either have forborne to exert creating power, or have formed a state of things quite different to what is, or what we can possibly conceive. Or, allowing that he might have created angels and men, he must have formed or preserved them impeccable, or secured their continuance in a state of undeviating rectitude, and then angels and men had not been what they are. They were formed with power to stand, yet liable to fall; else they could not have been accountable. However high and holy the creatures of God may be when formed, mutability is in their very essence.* To ask why God did not create angels and men so that they could not possibly fall, is to ask why he did not create them Gods, which question is evidently absurd. It is the exclusive prerogative of God to be immutable, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. If it was right, therefore, for God to create intelligent moral beings, he must create them holy, but, at the same time, mutable; else, they could not be subject to praise or blame. It may be admitted, that God could, by an act of sovereign grace, have

* Some will ask, If God would make man, why did he not restrain him from sin, especially since he knew he would sin if he did not? All moral and rational means to prevent him were employed. God did everything that could be required in a way of equity; and man had no claim upon grace. Such claim would destroy the notion of grace. And it would be a hard case indeed, if God must be laid under obligation to keep an accountable creature from sin, or, if he does not, must be censured for the creature's conduct.

confirmed angels and men in a state of perfect holiness; but then he has not done so, and the question is, whether or not he was bound to do so? If he was under obligation to preserve moral agents from sin, his doing so could not have been considered as an act of free grace, but only as an act of pure justice; and as the existence of things declare that he has not preserved his creatures from sin, he must, on this principle, have forfeited his claim to Deity, and so we are left without a righteous God in the world. Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid! Jehovah surely had a right to form a holy, happy creature, and, without controlling the will or infringing the liberty of that creature, permit him to act for himself, and then to deal with him accordingly.

SECTION II.

God's right to punish sinners.

This being granted, that God, in permitting sin, did not act unjustly, it may be asked, Has God a *right* to punish sin, *thus* permitted to come into our world?

This will lead us to consider what sin is. It is a transgression of the law, a violation of the commandment. It is either a coming short of what is required, or a doing what is forbidden. Whether punishment for such a failure is just, depends upon the nature and justice of the law. The law of which sin is a transgression is said to be "holy, just, and good." It is pure in its nature, and reasonable in its requirements. It is designed and calculated to promote the honour and happiness of those who

obey it. It is not the command of a capricious, arbitrary being, but emanates from the holy nature of Jehovah, of whose amiable perfections it is a transcript. It does not proceed merely from the sovereign will of God, but arises from the nature of things, and from the existing relations between the Creator and his creatures, and the various relations there are among his creatures themselves. As moral obligation arises from the nature and circumstances of things, God cannot make the moral law different, without changing his own nature and that of his creatures. Hence a transgression of this law is a violation of nature, and an infringement on the order of things. This was the case when our first parents sinned. They brought disorder into the creation of God, and disturbed the harmony which the Creator had produced. As creatures, they were dependent upon God, and under strong obligations to believe, love, fear, trust, and obey him. But they dared to withhold their homage from him, to disbelieve his word, and disobey his command, and thus cast off their allegiance, and, as it were, set him at defiance. The nature of *their* sin is the nature of *all* sin. It is a direct act of rebellion against the best of beings, and a daring defiance of all his perfections. If such then be the nature of the law, and such the nature of sin, God is certainly righteous in the infliction of punishment upon sinners. "They that do such things are worthy of death." Nay; God, according to the representation he has given of himself in his holy word, would cease to be God if he could connive at sin, or let iniquity go unpunished. The punishment of sin flows as naturally from his glorious and holy attributes, as light proceeds from the sun.

This principle accounts for the necessity of the Redeemer's sufferings in order to the salvation of his people. God could not pass by sin and save the sinner without satisfaction, and without an expression of his abhorrence and detestation of sin. I say he *could* not. It was as impossible as for him to deny himself. Hence, being determined to save sinners, he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up a sacrifice for sin. If it will not be just in God to punish the transgressors of his holy law, how could he be pleased to bruise his dearly beloved Son, or be just in suffering him to be wounded and stricken for our transgression, and bruised for our iniquities?

But nothing unjust or contrary to equity can proceed from God, and therefore it is *just* in God to punish sin wherever it is found. Our next inquiry is—

Have not *all men* sinned and come short of the glory of God?

It is acknowledged that all have sinned in Adam, our federal head, and as such we are all by nature the children of wrath. But, not to insist on our native depravity, or original sin, are not all who have lived to a state of maturity actual transgressors of God's holy law? Is not every mouth, in this respect, stopped, and the whole world become guilty before God? If it is, therefore, proved, that both Jew and Gentile are all under sin, and that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law, it will follow that all men, as sinners, are under the curse of the law, and deserve to suffer the effects of God's holy displeasure. On this ground all sinners had been eternally

damned if the law had taken its course against them and there had been no Mediator and Surety. Without a Saviour, the case of fallen man would have been that of fallen angels—hopeless and remediless. We should without exception have been shut up in black despair.* There is no ground of hope to sinful men but through the death of Christ; and, therefore, if Christ had not died, we had universally perished. Some suppose the death of Christ for sinners was necessary to their just condemnation; but, on the contrary, it is, in my opinion, the only ground why *all* are *not* condemned. If the sufferings of Christ were consistent with the claims of divine justice, then those in whose stead he suffered were exposed to punishment; and, as mankind have all sinned, and stand upon the same ground, as guilty before God, so whether Christ died for all men, or only for a part, all deserved to suffer, and must have suffered eternally if Christ had not died for them. Hence, it follows, either that the sufferings of Christ were an act of injustice in God, or that he could justly have consigned to eternal misery the whole race of mankind. There could be no necessity that Jesus should die for a sinner in order to leave him without excuse. If the death of Christ be necessary to stop the sinner's mouth, what shall be said of the condemnation of those who never heard of his death?

* See Part ii., chap. ii. sec. 8.

SECTION III.

God could justly have punished all, therefore he can justly punish some.

If it would have been just in God to punish all mankind, how can it be an act of injustice to punish some? That which would have been equitable to the whole, can surely never become otherwise to a part. If a creditor has twenty debtors, from all of whom he has an equal right to demand payment, and, on refusal, has a right to cast them into prison, and detain them there till the debt be discharged, should he forgive fifteen of them, or receive from a surety the amount of the debt of fifteen, or of any given number, would it be injustice or cruelty in him to consign the remainder to prison, while he set at liberty those on whose behalf the debt was paid? Yet this is the very case supposed, that he could not be just in detaining any, unless provision had been made also for their deliverance. But when the surety has made full satisfaction on their behalf, his justice would then shine in committing them to prison, and detaining them there till they themselves should pay the uttermost farthing. If we inquire why they are cast into prison, it is replied, that it is on account of their obstinacy and unbelief in not receiving the receipt tendered them for the payment. This notion is so strange and unscriptural, that it is unnecessary to produce argument for its confutation. To suppose that the Lawgiver cannot justly condemn and punish the transgressors of his law unless Christ has died and made an atonement for them, is

directly at variance with all our notions of justice and equity.

Finally, it may be asked—

How can the death of Christ for a sinner be a ground for the just condemnation of *that* sinner?

The death of Christ is published in the gospel as a *ground* of hope to sinful man, as the *only* ground of hope. Sinners indiscriminately are called upon to regard this ground of hope, and are warranted and urged to build upon it. Now it is easily perceived how a rejection or neglect of this message may be a means of increasing the sinner's guilt, and aggravating his future misery, and thus the ministry of the gospel of Christ be the savour of death unto death. But there is a material difference between the idea of the death of Christ for a sinner, and the idea of a sinner rejecting the testimony of God respecting the mediation and death of his Son. The former removes the curse from the sinner, the latter incurs it; *that* is the fruit of divine and unbounded love to man, *this* the fruit of unbelief and enmity to God. It is, therefore, concluded, that that which delivers from condemnation cannot, in the nature of things, be a ground of condemnation. But the death of Christ delivers from it, and therefore will never be produced as necessary to justify God in condemning men. Thus, then, the first question is answered. God can *justly* condemn them to endless misery, even them for whom *no atonement* is made.

CHAPTER III.

UNBELIEVERS VISITED WITH INCREASED PUNISHMENT FOR THE REJECTION OF THE GOSPEL, THOUGH CHRIST DID NOT DIE FOR THEM.

QUESTION 2. *How can the rejection of the gospel justly increase the punishment of those for whom the Saviour did not die?*

THIS question supposes two things, neither of which, I think, can be proved from the Word of God.

SECTION

Sinners not required to believe that Christ died for them individually.

1. It supposes that unconverted sinners are required to believe that Christ died for them.* Now

* There have been some persons, called Calvinists, who have represented personal appropriation as essential to faith, and who have nevertheless acknowledged the doctrine of particular redemption. The writings of the celebrated Hervey generally proceed upon that principle. But certainly it is a view which has no countenance from the Bible, and is calculated to engender a dangerous presumption. The Arminians maintain Christ died for all; but, in general, they say nothing of appropriation before repentance and faith. But why should they not? If Jesus really died for all, every individual must be included in the whole, and, consequently, on that principle each might say, with application to himself, "Christ died for me."—(See Letters on the Duty of Man.) "For all who believe that doctrine must have such a faith," says Mr. Hall "unless they should happen to doubt their being of the human species."—(Help to Zion's Travellers, 2nd edit., p 110.)

this is nowhere revealed in the Bible respecting any man by name or person. It is not said of John, or Thomas, or William, that Christ died for him or any of them. This is so far from being revealed, that no one can say, "Christ loved me, and gave himself for me," until he lives by the faith of the Son of God. But if it is not revealed, it cannot be believed; nor can sinners be punished for not believing it. No man will be condemned at the last day for not believing his own personal interest in the death of Christ. In many cases, it would be an act of great presumption for a sinner to believe it, and, so far from being his duty, it would be a crime. We are required to believe, upon pain of God's displeasure, whatever he has published, but nothing more. As it is not revealed for whom Christ died, only that he died for sinners, so no man will be damned for not believing that of which no revelation is made. "Secret things belong to God, but things that are revealed belong to us and to our children." Besides, it is no part of saving faith for a man to believe that Christ died for him, because a man may believe that and be damned. Witness those self-deceivers and hypocrites who say they are Jews and are not. The utmost stretch of Christian charity will not admit that every one of those who believe that Christ died for all will be finally saved. But if men may believe that Christ died for them, and yet may finally be lost, it must follow that that faith is not *saving* faith, because it does not terminate in the salvation of the soul. Mr. Fuller says, "It is a fact, that the Scriptures rest the general invitations of the gospel upon the atonement of Christ." He refers, for proof, to 2 Cor. v. 19, 21; Matt. xxii. 4; John iii. 16. These texts, in my opinion, do not prove the

fact. He adds, "There is difficulty in these statements, but it belongs to the general subject. In short, we must either acknowledge an objective fulness in Christ's atonement *sufficient for the salvation of the whole world, were the whole world to believe in him;* or, in opposition to scripture and common sense, confine our exhortations to believe to such persons as have believed already."* The words I have put in italics nullify his whole argument, for they imply that the atonement does not benefit any but them that believe. The sufficiency of the atonement depends not upon any man's believing. It is either sufficient or insufficient of itself, independent of any thing else. Besides, on his plan the sinner must be informed and called to believe that Christ has atoned for his sins. But can this be done with truth with respect to every individual? This consideration is sufficient to overturn the idea that the invitations of the gospel rest upon the extent or universality of the atonement.

God requires sinners to believe his word, and he promises salvation to every one that believes. But he also threatens the unbeliever with eternal misery because he "believeth not in the name of the only begotten Son of God," and this very justly, without assuring the sinner that Jesus died for him.

SECTION II.

Sinners under obligation to believe what God has revealed.

The question also supposes that men cannot be under obligation to believe God unless his word testify

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* See Fuller's Dialogues.

that Christ died for all men, and consequently for them.

But is the sinner to be assured of his interest in the death of Christ before he can be required to believe the gospel or be deemed criminal for not believing it? Surely the Great Ruler of heaven and earth can call upon his creatures to believe his testimony, irrespective of their own interest or advantage in that testimony. Do not devils believe? are they not bound to believe what God declares? Devils believe themselves to be irrecoverably lost; and they ought to believe so, and sinners of mankind are required to believe that they are sinners, and that Christ can and will save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him. Those who do not believe this divine record respecting the Saviour shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on them. Is it reasonable to bind Jehovah to assure a sinner that his only begotten Son died for his sins, before he can justly command that sinner to believe his holy word?* Suppose God required me to believe this proposition, *My Son died for thee*, and had clearly, in so many words, revealed it in the Bible, I should be highly criminal, and deserve to perish, if I did not believe it. But this is nowhere revealed respecting any one remaining in a state of unbelief. And if not revealed, it cannot be the object of faith. It is peculiar to believers to know Christ died for them, and they cannot know it but as believers; they must therefore be believers in Christ before they can have any ground to believe that Christ died for them; otherwise, assurance of interest in the death of Christ would precede faith in Him, and

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* See Dr. Williams's Essay, pp. 187—190, where he talks of *procuring* the Spirit, &c.

the man who never exercised faith in the Saviour might possess assurance of salvation, contrary to the whole tenor of Divine revelation, and to the express declaration of Jesus—"If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." Again, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

It is evident, then, that God does not require the unconverted, upon pain of his displeasure, to believe that Christ died for them, or that he died for all men, and yet that he does most justly and reasonably require them to believe his holy word, and threaten them with eternal death for their unbelief. The second supposition is, therefore, proved to be absurd, and we might consider the question answered, and the difficulty removed. But it may not be altogether irrelevant to glance a little further at man's obligation.

Sinners are required to believe what God has revealed concerning Himself, man, sin, salvation, Christ, heaven, hell, &c. On these points it would be easy to enlarge. Man is a sinner, guilty, impure, impotent, and his heart at enmity with God, and opposed to everything spiritual and divine. He is under the curse of a broken law, and deserves to perish everlastingly, and must do so if divine grace does not in a sovereign way interpose. Christ is a Saviour, an able and willing Saviour, all-sufficient for the important work, having obeyed the law in every precept, having sustained and removed the curse, made a complete atonement, satisfied all the claims of divine justice, conquered hell, and opened a new and living way to heaven, and is become the author

of eternal salvation to all them that obey him. He is full of grace and truth, for it pleased the Father that in him all fulness should dwell. He is, therefore, able to save. No sinner's case is beyond his power. He is able to do abundantly above what we can ask or think. Man is, therefore, required to believe that he is a ruined sinner, that Christ alone is able to save him, and that he is called to come to him for life and eternal salvation. He, then, that believes or comes to Christ, shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.

These things, and other important truths connected with them, are clearly stated in the holy Scriptures, and sinners are urged by all possible arguments to believe them, personally and individually, and with appropriation. They are warned, and besought with earnestness, to flee from the wrath to come—to forsake the foolish, and live—to turn from their wickedness, from their pride, self-righteousness, and love of sin; and are assured, that if they come to Jesus for rest, righteousness, and life, they shall not be cast out, but shall be pardoned, and preserved, and saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation. Now, a disregard to these exhortations and warnings, and a rejection of these gracious invitations, increase the sinner's guilt, and render his punishment more intolerable. "And since there is neither act nor design of God, open or concealed, that implies any opposition whereby the sinner is restrained from building on this foundation, God will be clear when he judgeth. If what is in itself sufficient, and what God has proved and represented to be so, be not actually received for salvation, the blame attaches only to him who rejects

such means and testimony."* The righteous Judge may and will most justly remind them of despised or neglected opportunities and privileges. "I called, and ye refused; I stretched out my hand, and no man regarded. But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof. I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh. When your fear cometh as a desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you; thus shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me. For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD; they would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof: therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices." "But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his Spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts. Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the Lord of hosts." "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for them." The men of Nineveh shall rise up in judgment with those who despise the gospel, and condemn them, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, while these make light of the message of grace, sent to them by the only begotten Son of God. The queen of the

* Dr. Williams's Essay, p. 189, 3rd edit.

south shall be a witness against them, and her conduct shall condemn theirs. She came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, who was but a mere man, while these refuse to hear the wisdom of Jesus, who is the wisdom of God, and in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. If he had not come and spoken to them, they would comparatively have had no sin, but now they have no cloak or excuse for their sin. The Redeemer, morally speaking, has done what he could; and all proving ineffectual, he weeps over them; saying, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" Surely, sinners who have been thus favoured and entreated, and who prove incorrigible under all, must meet with a double damnation in a future world. No pleas which they may urge will avail them. Christ says to them, "Ye have both seen and hated, both me and my Father." Yes, and they have hated him without a cause. This is the just ground of their condemnation, (John iii. 18, 20.) The want of atonement, and the want of divine influence, will not so much as be mentioned against him at the great day of accounts. The deeds done in the body, by himself, will form the sole ground of accusation against him. The Jews, to whom saving influence was not communicated, are condemned for unbelief, and declared, at the same time, to be without excuse. Men may say, that they cannot believe without divine influence, and that, therefore, they are unjustly blamed; but this is sooner said than proved.

Let them seriously examine what hinders them from exercising faith upon God's testimony. Is there anything wanting in the testimony to warrant faith? Is the evidence of its truth weak and unsatisfactory? Are the credentials of the gospel insufficient? Is it not confirmed by the oath of Him who cannot lie? It comes to us recommended by unnumbered miracles, wrought by Moses and the prophets, by Jesus and his apostles, and sealed and ratified by the blood of Immanuel. Millions have believed it, and have set to their seal that God is true; and multitudes, rather than deny it, have laid down their lives a sacrifice, to evince the sincerity of their faith in the divine word. What, then, is wanting to encourage faith? The matter is important, you have an unbounded concern in it, and the word of the truth of the gospel is firmer than the pillars of earth or heaven. The word of the Lord endureth for ever. There is nothing wanting but a heart to believe it. His disinclination to credit divine testimony, is the sinner's crime. An unbelieving heart is an evil heart, and nothing can be offered as an excuse for it. The unbeliever is condemned, and the justice of Jehovah shines in his damnation, because he has refused to believe on his only begotten Son. On this ground their misery will be augmented, and thus the *second question* is answered. From the whole, it appears that the rejection of the gospel will *justly* increase the punishment even of those persons for whose sins no atonement was made.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SINCERITY OF GOD IN HIS INVITATIONS TO SINNERS TO EMBRACE THE GOSPEL, THOUGH THE SAVIOUR DID NOT DIE FOR ALL.

QUESTION 3. *How can God be sincere in his invitations to those sinners for whose salvation no provision is made?*

IT is asked with a bold tone, whether it can be consistent with truth and with sincerity, to invite to that which does not exist, to press persons to partake of a feast when no provision is made for them? Whether this inquiry can be satisfactorily answered or not, it must be granted that God does entreat and beseech sinners most earnestly to turn to him and live. "Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely." Invitations to come to Christ are found almost everywhere in the sacred Scriptures, and they are urged by prophets and apostles with great importunity.* "Knowing the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men. We are ambassadors for Christ; as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God." Jehovah, in the most solemn manner, inquires, "Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord." Nay, he confirms it with an oath—"As I live, saith the Lord God, I have

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* See p. 358.

no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" And did not the Redeemer, in the same strain, weep over the infidelity and ruin of Jerusalem? Now, it is asked, What sincerity can there be in these declarations, invitations, and expostulations, if an atonement is not made for all those who are invited to come?

SECTION I.

The Sincerity of God not disprovable though Christ did not die for all.

The sincerity of God in the general invitations of his word has been proved and vindicated in this Essay, part ii., chap. ii., sections 2 and 3, to which the reader is referred. The following remarks are now added to corroborate the fact.

Have any sinners come to God and been refused his favours? There has hitherto been enough, and to spare, for all that have applied. Who can refer to an instance of a soul making application and meeting with a repulse or denial? It is impossible to produce one. The glorified in heaven certainly met with acceptance and provision. Their present enjoyment of God is demonstrative proof. Make the inquiry in hell. Go from one miserable spirit to another, and ask, Did you come to the gospel feast and find there was no provision made for you? Did you find the door of mercy shut upon you, and the Redeemer's heart closed against you, when you applied? Truth is forced from them in those dreary

regions:—"We never applied, we never sought. The Lord called, but we refused. We would not have him to reign over us. Proceed no further. The remembrance of despised mercy increases our present misery. We would not come to Christ that we might have life; and, therefore, he has justly banished us from his presence for ever." Such would be the testimony in the regions of misery. There is no man living upon earth that can solemnly declare, in the presence of the heart-searching God, that he has sincerely sought and desired mercy and salvation in Jehovah's appointed way, and has been refused. Heaven, earth, and hell, bear testimony that God refuses none that come. Ask, and it shall be given you. Every one that asketh receiveth. Let God be true though every man is a liar. Why, then, should God's sincerity be disputed when it has never been disproved?

Is a person necessarily insincere when he invites to a feast, if he does not, along with his invitation, effectually constrain the invited to attend? Must his sincerity be doubted because his offer is refused and his favour slighted? Or, must he be deemed delusive and hypocritical if he invites all, when he knows beforehand that some will frame excuses and refuse to partake of his feast? Or, shall the man be charged with insincerity who warns another of his danger, because he does not, at the same time, effectually restrain him from it? Why, then, shall God be represented as insincere in inviting sinners to the gospel feast? It is true, that the Deity knows all the invited, left to themselves, will refuse. But shall he be taxed with duplicity on the ground of their wilful obstinacy? Surely not. If God effectually constrain and incline a certain number

to accept and embrace his invitation, shall the rest, who had free liberty to come, charge him with insincerity? Such a charge would be altogether unsupported, and contrary to what generally obtains among men.

I am not ignorant that Mr. Hinton has, in his own opinion, and perhaps in the opinion of many others,* irrefutably proved that, upon the principle of particular redemption, God cannot be *sincere* in his universal invitations to sinners. Those who hold that Christ did not die for all, and yet invite all to come to Jesus, are charged with *thoughtless inconsistency*.† The wealthy person making a feast, and giving a general and public invitation that whoever will may come, and yet *intends* to *limit* his kindness to a select number, is produced as a fair comparison; and the inquiry is made, Would it be honourable, candid, or true? or would it not be mean, fraudulent, and false? Heavy charges are here implied. The invitation "would bring crowds of the hungry indiscriminately to the door." Does the parallel hold here? Where are the crowds? Do any come to God and find "that the general invitation was—*an imposition and a lie*"? Let Mr. H. point out the individual who has, upon the ground of the general invitation, come to Christ, and has not found his "expectations realized."‡ He will reply, that it would be so, were not the atonement or death of Christ as wide as the invitation. It is easier to make assertions than to prove them. "The practical question relates to the intention of the donor," says Mr. Hinton, and here we are agreed. The invited would

* Preface to Harmony, p. xxxi.

Harmony, p. 284. ‡ Ibid. p. 278.

say, and say very justly, upon personal application, "*Did you not mean* that I should have some food?"* And would a sinner in such circumstances be disappointed? But return to the INTENTION of the donor. Is it the *intention* of God that every man and woman in the world shall partake of the gospel feast? If so, do all partake? or is God's intention frustrated? Mr. H. allows that "God knows beforehand who will come at his call, and that they are *precisely* the persons whom he MEANS to entertain.†

Does not Mr. H., then, maintain the principle which he has so unsparingly censured—viz., "a general invitation with a select intention"?‡ Our author represents the death of Christ as "securing the actual redemption of the elect only;"§ and, elsewhere, securing "the exercise of faith itself, and the unsought communication of the Spirit."‖ Are not these principles clogged with the very same difficulties that Mr. H. charges upon particular redemption in connexion with universal invitations? If Christ secures faith and the Holy Spirit to the *elect* ONLY, how many besides, even upon the supposition that Christ died for all, *will ever come* to the gospel feast? Will "crowds indiscriminately come to the door?" Notwithstanding the general invitation, the saints of the Lord acknowledge, with our sweet poet,—

" 'Twas the same love that spread the feast
That *sweetly forced* us in;
Else, we had still refused to taste,
And perished in our sin."—*Watts.*

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* Harmony, p. 279. † Ibid. p. 278.
‡ Ibid. p. 279. § Ibid. p. 285. ‖ Theology, p. 174.

Mr. H. must either renounce his views of eternal election, and the *special design* which, according to that election, he ascribes to the death of the Saviour, or, he must be content to appropriate to himself the inconsistencies he so lavishly imputes to others.

SECTION II.

Guilt and punishment increased by making light of the gospel.

Disobedience to the divine word, and making light of the gospel invitations, will justify God in the infliction of punishment proportionable in magnitude to their aggravated guilt. The command of God, simply considered, would justify him in punishing for disobedience and unbelief; but we are speaking of those who live under the gospel. Their increased guilt and aggravated misery proceed upon the ground of divine warning, caution, and invitation, and of their despising and rejecting the Saviour of men. Jesus died for sinners, and as sinners they are invited to come to him for life and salvation, and have every assurance that the God of eternal and inviolable truth can give, that they shall be saved. Their rejection of the gospel is the very same in its nature as if Christ had really died for them. God has pledged his word, his promise, and his oath, that no sinner in coming to Christ for life and salvation shall ever be disappointed.

Refusing to come to Christ, therefore, is a direct rejection of him, and of all the benefits of his death, and a wilful contempt of God and his precious invitations. On this ground, God is perfectly clear and

just in their greater condemnation. There is no distinction made in favour of one class or description of men to the prejudice of another. The very elect of God, previous to their believing, have no other ground, nor any greater encouragement to believe in Christ, or to come to him for life and salvation, than the non-elect. The fact is, there is no known distinction among men as elect or non-elect previous to their embracing Christ. No doubt the elect themselves are guilty of rejecting Christ and the invitations of the gospel, long and repeatedly before they are made willing in the day of God's power. This perfectly accords with Christian experience and with godly sorrow for sin.

It may be observed, that man is unholy as well as guilty, and that he needs regeneration and sanctification as much as redemption and pardon; and that the former are beyond his own power to effect, and as much the work of God as the latter. Of what advantage is the atonement to any if it is not applied? and as the application is the work of God, is not the sinner for whom Christ died left as hopeless and as far from heaven, without the application of redemption to his mind, as if the Redeemer had not died for him? Hence we perceive the irrelevance and invalidity of the argument for the universal call of the gospel, as founded on the extent of the atonement. For the very same argument would apply to the limited extent of election and effectual vocation. Has not Mr. Fuller himself, with all his zeal and acumen for the universality of the atonement, been compelled, by the force of truth, to admit the oneness of redemption and election? Take his words—"I do not consider particular redemption as being so much a doctrine of itself, as a branch of

the great doctrine of election, which runs through all God's works of grace. If this branch of election had not been more opposed than others, I reckon we should no more have thought of applying the term *particular* to it than to vocation, justification, or glorification. The idea applies to these as well as to the other." This, I think, is correct, but not easily reconciled with the generalizing scheme. If we must not exhort sinners unless we can prove that Christ died for them, no more must we unless we can prove that they are elected, and shall be called, justified, and saved. If no provision is made for their vocation, justification, and final and full salvation, as Fuller, Hinton, and others allow, it is equally inconsistent to invite sinners to embrace life and salvation, as it is on the principle of particular redemption. The general scheme must either be carried throughout from eternal election to eternal glorification, or limited throughout. It is therefore evident, either that God is bound to do everything for the sinner, needful to his salvation, which the sinner cannot do for himself, that is, completely to save him, in order to justify his conduct in condemning him, or else, that the sinner's sin, in transgressing the law, and especially in his wilful rejection of the gospel and despising the Saviour, is sufficient eternally to silence the sinner, and to justify the divine conduct in consigning him over to the darker and deeper regions of endless misery and black despair.*

* Mr. Hinton, and perhaps some others, will affirm, that man can change his own heart, and convert and sanctify himself; and that, therefore, this reasoning is inconclusive. Regeneration, however, is essential to salvation; and this is ascribed, "not to blood, nor to the will of the flesh, nor to the will of man, but to God." "Of his own will begat he us, by the word of truth."

SECTION III.

Conclusion.—Lost sinners always slighted the Saviour.

Finally, does it not clearly appear that those persons who shall be doomed to eternal misery are such only as have chosen death rather than life, have loved darkness rather than light, and who have slighted Christ, and been determined that he should never reign over them? They never loved God, nor desired the knowledge of his ways, nor liked to retain God in their knowledge; nay, their carnal minds were always enmity to God. They slighted God, treated him with indifference, and sought no acquaintance with him, but shunned him or treated with scorn and contempt. This was seen in their treatment of his word, his sabbaths, his ordinances, his ministers, and his people. They were ungrateful to God for the numerous, or rather innumerable, favours received daily from his munificent hand. They did not thank him for their food and raiment, health and reason, nor for the means of his grace and the revelation of his will. They opposed God in all his designs, especially in the setting up and establishment of the kingdom of his Son. They chose hell rather than heaven, and proved this by preferring the ways of sin to the ways of holiness. They were never willing to come to the gospel feast, nor desirous to be saved by Jesus, not at any time of their lives, nor under any circumstances whatever. They were never willing to confess their iniquity to be what it really was, nor to renounce themselves and their own righteousness, and to trust in Christ exclusively for life and eternal

salvation. What can such sinners say for themselves? They must needs stand speechless before the tribunal of God, or acknowledge their condemnation to be just. It will not avail them to say, "There was no provision made for us." For how can they affirm this when they never came? They despised the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long suffering, and the goodness of God did not bring them to repentance. When invited and pressed to come to the feast, with an assurance that all things were ready, they made frivolous excuses, or roundly declared they could not, they would not come. Shall these pretend that there was no provision for them? Their defence will serve for nothing but to prove their offence, aggravate their crime and their misery, and evince their damnation to be just. Great mercies refused or despised will make divine justice shine refulgently in the punishment of such proud contemners of God's salvation. "Behold, ye *despisers*, and wonder, and *perish*: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you."

Professors of religion who have had a form of godliness, and have been numbered among God's people, who yet are finally lost, will never be able to say that they came with hungry appetites to the door of mercy, but nothing was provided for them, nor to disprove the Redeemer's testimony concerning them, that they were workers of iniquity, and never approved of him or were approved by him. Hypocrites, self-righteous professors, and apostates will be compelled, by an inward conviction of their own desert, to justify the Judge while he appoints them their portion with the devil and his angels. Not one of all the inhabitants of hell will be able to charge his sin or

misery upon the *decrees* of God, the *want* of atonement, or the *denial* of the Spirit's influence. The destruction of a sinner proceeds only and wholly from himself; but if he is saved, the praise belongs to God. Thus saith the Lord, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help."

The sentiments here maintained may be summarily comprehended in the following proposition:—

God will be just in adding to the punishment of those who were not included in the purchase of Christ, but who have lived where the gospel was preached, and have died unholy, in impenitence and unbelief.

Now this appears reasonable—

1. Because of the truth of the gospel, the nature and importance of that truth, and the clear and irrefragable evidence which God has condescendingly given of its divine origin.

2. Because the gospel reveals the all-sufficiency of Christ to save sinners without distinction. Christ died for sinners,—for the chief of sinners. His atonement is held forth as a ground of hope to man, and as a display of the righteousness of God. The value and sufficiency of this atonement have been already admitted. Christ is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. This is the truth revealed, which we are required to believe, and will remain a fact whether we believe it or not.

3. Because God, in the gospel, commands all men to whom it comes to repent and believe; and gives them every possible encouragement, by pressings, warnings, and invitations, to come to Christ for life and salvation, assuring them that he will in nowise cast out them who come to him.

4. Because, in the gospel, God promises salvation

and eternal life to all who believe, and threatens with eternal damnation every hearer of the gospel who believeth not. These promises and threatenings are firmer than the pillars of heaven. God will do as he has said. Surely the people are grass; the grass withereth, and the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand for ever. "He that believeth the gospel, and is baptized, shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." Those who reject the counsel of God, and neglect the great salvation published to them, will find, in the day of judgment, that it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for them.

ON

THE DUTY OF MAN,

IN

LETTERS TO A FRIEND.

LETTER THE FIRST.

Introduction.—Explanation of Duty.

My dear Friend,

Every relation which man sustains involves a corresponding duty. As a creature, man is under imperative and indissoluble obligations to love, trust, and obey his Creator. No circumstances in which he can be placed can elevate him above or sink him below, or in any other way release him from these obligations. In conjunction with his duty to God, he owes many duties to his fellow-creatures. His family, his neighbourhood, his country, yea, the world at large have claims upon his services, which he cannot neglect with impunity. Upon these particulars I cannot now enter nor even enumerate them.

It must not be forgotten, however, that man is fallen from the state of purity and happiness in which he was created. It is sometimes inquired whether that which was the duty of Adam, in his state of innocence, be the duty of his sinful posterity? and whether man's obligations are increased

or diminished in consequence of his apostacy from God? I shall not investigate what is implied in these inquiries farther than to say that Adam could not be required to love God with more than all his heart; and less than that cannot be required from his posterity. Repentance could not be his duty before he sinned; but to contend that he was not afterwards obliged to repent would be to justify his transgression. Certainly, in his primeval state, he was bound to believe whatever God might reveal, and his obligation surely cannot be cancelled or lessened by his disobedience. The sin of man cannot nullify the authority of God. Where there is no sin there is no obligation to repentance; and where there is no revelation, there can be no obligation to believe. But if man is a sinner, and Jehovah has given him a revelation of his will, repentance and faith are necessarily incumbent duties.

Whether the Bible, wherever it comes, requires of every sinner true repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Saviour, has been a question not a little controverted.

If the Bible be a revelation from heaven, faith must be considered of great importance. The doctrines of man's total ruin by sin, and of his salvation by grace, cannot produce any salutary effect any farther than they are believed. The sinner, while he is instructed as to his guilt and his depravity, his impotence and his danger, remains unaffected, because he does not credit the report. The record God has given respecting the Redeemer's person, work, and ability to save, cannot inspire the unbeliever with love or confidence. The most important truths ever delivered can only produce effects in proportion as they are believed. Faith and purity are connected.

Truth believed sanctifies the soul. God purifies the hearts of his people by faith. Unbelief is the fruitful source of sin and rebellion against God. It disregards the law, and makes light of the precious invitations of the gospel. It laughs at the threatenings and curses of the former, and mocks at the promises and blessings of the latter. It is a reigning sin, the fruitful parent of many others, an obstruction to heaven, and the way to hell. If, then, we consider the value of our souls, and the ultimate and eternal results of faith and unbelief, it cannot remain a matter of trifling moment whether we shall be numbered among those " who believe to the saving of the soul," or have our " portion with hypocrites and unbelievers." " He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved ; and he that believeth not shall be damned." How desirable is it that we should have scriptural views of the nature and extent of our duty. " Without faith it is impossible to please God ;" and " whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

It has been much controverted whether FAITH is or is not the duty of all who are favoured with the means of knowing the gospel. Some have contended that faith, being the *gift* of God, *cannot* be the *duty* of man. It being the effect of Almighty energy, they think it *cannot* be required of the creature. As matter of duty, they consider it as absurd to exhort a sinner to believe in Christ as to require him to exercise omnipotence. Without anticipating arguments and objections, I will endeavour, at your request, to give you a few plain and important thoughts upon the subject.

You will naturally and very justly expect that I should enter upon this point with caution, and carefully explain and define the terms employed

when it is affirmed or denied that *faith is a duty*. By the word *duty*, I understand something which a man is obliged to do, or something he is obliged to forbear. It is that which may be justly demanded or equitably and reasonably required of a person. It is the duty of children to obey their parents, and of servants to obey their masters; of husbands to love their wives, and of wives to reverence their husbands, and of all men to be just to their fellow-men. These things are justly required. They cannot, without sin and guilt, be treated with indifference. In this light, either faith is a duty or it is not. Either sinners are, and may justly be required to believe, or it is not their *duty* to believe, and they are not under any obligation, and do not contract guilt by disbelieving. For duty must be so explained as that the non-performance of it must be criminal, and constitute the defaulter guilty. That cannot be a duty, the neglect of which is no sin. Duty implies also the capabilities of the person to yield obedience; for a real or natural incapacity to obey releases from obligation. In the very nature of things, God cannot require impossibilities from his creatures. He cannot command man to be an angel, nor to create a world, or a grain of sand, nor to perform anything upon pain of his displeasure, to which his natural powers are not equal. His duty arises out of the powers he possesses, in connexion with his relation to his Creator and preserver. The various properties of God and man coming in contact, lay the foundation of government and duty. Relations are constituted by creation, providence, and grace, and obligations correspond with the relations formed, and the benefits received, according to the diversified circumstances of different subjects.

I may employ too many words in my endeavour to be explicit, but I intend by the word *duty* that which a person is laid under obligation to perform by the requisition of one who has a right to command. The *right* of God to command, we should think, will not be disputed. But let it not be understood that Jehovah's commands of a moral nature are merely expressions of his will, declaring, as a Ruler, what his arbitrary pleasure dictates. His will is not the simple standard of right, but the expression of that right: His will is governed by his nature, and that nature dictates necessarily what is the duty of his creatures.

There are some positive commands given by the Most High which do not arise from the nature of things, but from the sovereignty of the divine will; yet when once clearly revealed, they become morally binding as matter of duty, by virtue of that all-comprehensive principle, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart."

To come to a satisfactory conclusion, whether faith be a duty in the sense that the word duty has been explained, it will be necessary to ascertain what is meant by *faith*, and then, whether, as defined, it is required by the command of God in the sacred Scriptures. But the different representations given of faith will require an examination which I shall defer to my next letter.

I am, &c.

LETTER THE SECOND.

The various accounts of faith, examined.

My dear Friend,

In defining faith, I must notice the language of those who deny that it is the duty of sinners to believe. They ask, "Is it the duty of sinners in general to have the *faith of God's elect*, or to possess *saving faith?* If this be the duty of sinners," say they, "it is their duty to believe a lie." I will attempt an impartial examination of the phrases, "the faith of God's elect" and "saving faith."

The faith of God's elect is a phrase which occurs only once in the Bible, namely, in Titus i. 1, and it appears not to signify the act of believing, but the truth believed. It is the faith once delivered to the saints, the faith of the gospel, for which believers are to strive and contend.* Paul, after his conversion, preached "the faith which once he destroyed,"† namely, "the faith of God's elect." He here informs Titus, that he was commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ, the head of the church, to deliver this faith to the saints, or the elect of God. He was an "apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect," to make known, as an ambassador of Christ, what was to be believed, to call men to "the acknowledgment of the truth which is after godliness," and to be the happy instrument of bringing the chosen of the Lord to the belief of the truth, and to the "hope of eternal life which God,

* Jude 3; Phil. i. 27.

† Gal. i. 23.

that cannot lie, promised before the world began; but hath in due time manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me, according to the commandment of God our Saviour." The scope of the place clearly evinces, that *the faith of God's elect* signifies the truth which was preached by Paul, and is believed by the elect of God.

In this manner the text is paraphrased by Dr. Doddridge—"*Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of* his only begotten Son *Jesus Christ, for* the advancement of *the faith of God's chosen people, and* to promote *the acknowledgment of the truth* of the gospel, that divine doctrine *which (is) according to godliness*."* Dr. Guyse also concurs in this view of the text. Paul, he says, "was sent and instructed immediately by Jesus Christ, to bear witness to him, and preach his gospel of salvation in all its extent to *Jews* and *Gentiles*, according to the doctrine of faith which is embraced by, and is the means of working effectual faith in, God's own people."† That this exposition of the phrase may be confirmed out of the mouth of three witnesses, I will add the testimony of Dr. Gill, and more especially as he is considered unfriendly to the opinion, that it is the *duty* of all men to believe in Christ. He says—"This may regard the end of his apostleship, and be rendered, *unto the faith of God's elect;* that is, either he was appointed an apostle to preach the doctrine of faith which once he destroyed, and which is but one, and is common to all the elect, and what is commonly received and embraced by the elect of God in all ages; or, to be a means and instrument of bringing the elect of God to that faith in Christ

* Doddridge on the place. † Guyse on the place.

which is peculiar to them."* Thus the gospel is the faith of God's elect, as it is the object believed, and the instrument by which faith is produced. "For faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." I have insisted the longer upon this, because they who deny the sinner's obligation to believe have perpetual recource to this text, as their principal proof, considering the apostle to speak of the grace of faith, as experienced by the elect, and not the doctrine of faith as taught by Paul. They exclaim with this mistaken sense of the passage, "What! then every man is to believe with the faith of God's elect,—to believe himself one of the elect. Then the reprobate is to believe a lie, for he never was, nor ever will be, or can be, one of God's elect." Thus, systems are built and supported upon single texts of scripture, interpreted by the mere sound of words, rather than the analogy of faith and the tenor of divine truth.

But suppose it were admitted that the phrase signifies the act of faith exercised upon divine testimony by the elect of God, would it follow from hence that, because the elect, by divine influence, are taught and enabled to perform their duty, and to believe what God has revealed concerning sin and salvation, that others are at liberty, without guilt, to reject the divine word, and to disbelieve the God of eternal and inviolable truth? Let the following inquiries be candidly considered and conscientiously answered. Is believing an exercise of the mind? and is it the duty of the elect to believe? or, when they believe, do they comply with any obligation laid upon them by the Lord? or does he not re-

* Dr. Gill on the place.

quire even his elect to believe? If it be not their duty previous to their believing, then they produce a work of supererogation, and go beyond what strict duty requires, when they set to their seal that God is true. But admitting that it was a duty binding upon them, as the elect of God, by what certain rule can they ascertain their election previous to their believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, and so come to a knowledge of their duty? They must possess a vast depth of penetration to discover their election of God antecedent to their reception of the gospel by faith. That was not the experience of the Thessalonians.* Allowing, however, that it is the duty of the elect to believe, then it will follow that it is criminal in them not to believe; and can that which would be sin in the elect, be otherwise in the non-elect? Thus, on either hand, the opponents of the sentiment, that it is the duty of sinners to believe, find themselves on the horns of a dilemma, and gain nothing by their own interpretation of the text.

The phrase "*saving faith*" is frequently employed in theological discussions, and especially by those who exonerate sinners from obligation to believe. "We allow," say they, "that sinners ought to believe, but not with a *saving faith*; for saving faith is peculiar to the elect. None else can possess it, because none else will be saved." What idea some persons connect with the terms *saving faith*, it is not possible for me to know without their own explanation. Probably they do not mean that faith is a *Saviour*, but that it is itself an important part of salvation, considered as the gift of God. This, I presume, will not be denied. In this sense, we

* 1 Thes. i. 4, 5.

might speak also of saving repentance, saving hope, and saving love; because they, like faith, are the the gift of God, and are inseparably connected with salvation. Indeed, the same epithet might be applied to every feeling and act which springs from divine influence, and terminate in everlasting happiness. The phrase "*saving faith,*" as applied to the act of believing, may, no doubt, be used in a sober and restricted sense, without violating any part of revealed truth. As faith is the principal instrument by which we receive and realize the blessings of salvation, and on the existence and exercise of which salvation, in the enjoyment of it, depends, the phrase *saving faith* may be allowable; and may receive some countenance from the Saviour's language to the woman—"Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace."* But, admitting the propriety of the terms, how does it follow that *saving faith,* or that faith with which salvation is connected, is not also a matter of duty? A change in the name does not affect the inquiry, whether faith, or, as some term it, saving faith, is the duty of those who are favoured with the gospel; for, I presume, both mean the same thing, though the epithet is designed by one party to make a distinction. I freely acknowledge that I intend by faith, without the additional epithet, the same thing which I judge others intend, namely, that faith which purifies the heart, which works by love, and obtains a victory over the world. And what is this faith but a belief of the truth? I contend that every human being, possessing the Bible, is under the strongest obligation to believe the truth of God, and that whosoever does believe shall not

* Luke vii. 50.

perish, but have eternal life. The phrases which have now been examined are not at all relevant to the question whether faith be a duty. They may as readily be produced to support one side as the other.

Other distinctions respecting faith are resorted to, in order to support the hypothesis that it is not the duty of sinners to believe. It is allowed that the faith of miracles may be common to good and to bad men, to saints and to sinners; and, therefore, this might, in some cases, be a duty. But we do not live in an age of miracles, nor have we any warrant to expect them; and therefore this, which is entirely irrelevant to the subject before us, is dismissed without further remark. That men ought to believe with a *human*, but not a *divine*, faith is also generally acknowledged. Faith, I suppose, can only be divided into *human* and *divine* with respect to its object; one having the testimony of man, the other that of God, for its foundation. "There is a great difference between human faith and divine faith. I call that human faith that stands in the wisdom of man, and hath only human, external, and moral proof or evidence to support it. And I call that divine faith that stands in the power of God, and the demonstration of the Holy Ghost to support it."* It is strange, indeed, if sinners are under obligation to believe their fellow-sinners, and at liberty to disbelieve their Maker. Obligation to faith should be proportioned to the certainty of the truth of the testimony. "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater." "Let God be true, but every man a liar." This distinction, however, has no bearing upon the question any farther

* Treatise on the Faith and Hope of the Gospel.

than that truth ought to be believed, when ascertained, whether spoken by God or man.

Some admit that we may and ought to believe with an *historical* faith; by which must be meant, either a belief of history, or such kind of faith as is exercised when we give credit to historical facts, founded upon sufficient evidence. But in this sense, historical faith is included, and must necessarily be so, in the faith of every Christian. True faith is a *belief of the truth of God.* And what is that truth but a history of the great work of human redemption by the incarnation, the life, labours, sufferings, and death of his only begotten Son? Does not the Bible furnish the history of the creation and fall of man, and of the various steps which infinite wisdom and love have taken to accomplish the eternal purposes of Jehovah in the salvation of his chosen? What were once prophecy and mystery to Old Testament saints, are to us plain historical narrations of important facts. The miracles, discourses, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, and the consequent effects in the spread of the gospel, the conversion of sinners, and the establishment of Christian churches, are narrated, in the Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles, as historical facts, and laid down in all the epistles as the foundation of faith. Hence the church at Ephesus was "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." That faith which works by love, and purifies the heart, must have historical facts for its basis. Divine histories, as well as promises, are objects of faith. God has recorded the history of his Son to be believed. But if by historical faith be meant only a belief of those

parts of the Bible which give an historical account of the creation—of the flood—of the patriarchs—of the peopling of the world—of the different nations of the earth—the deliverance of the Hebrews from Egypt—their subsequent journeys and miraculous preservation in the wilderness—their conquest of Canaan—and their sins, wars, captivities, &c.—without any regard to the designs of God, and of that spiritual and eternal salvation which is revealed in conjunction with these histories, it is admitted such faith is required of all men, as included in the belief of the truth, and may be exercised by those who never believe to the saving of the soul. They may view these things as they would view the histories of Greece or Rome, of England or of France. This is a mere belief of the facts of sacred history, without any regard to the end or design of them. It is a belief of the letter, and not of the spirit, of even that part of divine revelation. Though such faith is essential to the Christian, yet it may be possessed by those who are dead in trespasses and sins.

The faith of the stony-ground hearers and of Simon Magus has been referred to, as proof that men may be called upon to believe, without supposing that it is their duty to believe in Christ to the salvation of the soul. This is styled by Dr. Gill, "a temporary or theoretical faith, a speculative one, a bare naked assent to the truth of what is contained in the word, concerning God, and Christ, and divine things." But, allowing this definition to be correct (which I rather doubt), it has nothing to do with the argument. For certainly we should not exhort men to a temporary, but a permanent faith; not to the mere semblance or an empty profession of faith, which will end in open apostacy, but to that faith,

the end of which is the salvation of the soul; not to appearances, but divine realities; not to be hypocrites, as Simon Magus, but sincere followers of the Lamb, like Nathaniel—Israelites, indeed, in whom there is no guile. This view of faith, then, has no connexion with the subject to be investigated. Once more—

Mr. Hussey, according to the statement of Andrew Fuller, was the first writer of any eminence in the last century, who, by the general tenor of his writings, laid the foundation for the sentiment that it is not the duty of men in general to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls. Mr. Brine defended the sentiment. Dr. Gill took no active part in the controversy, but, in his general writings, took the negative side of the question. He contended that men ought not promiscuously and indefinitely to be exhorted to believe in Christ, but admitted "that men ought to have a natural faith, and ought to perform the natural duties of religion, should pray to God for forgiveness and for daily mercies, and should give credit to divine revelation and believe the external report of the gospel."

It may possibly be owing to my dulness or want of apprehension, but I freely confess that I do not understand what the learned writer means by believing divine revelation, or the *external* report of the gospel, with a *natural* faith. Is there some *internal* report of the gospel? and is that to be believed with an *unnatural* faith? Or, is natural here opposed to *divine* or to *spiritual* faith? If the words, *natural* and *external*, with which the exhortation is qualified, were struck out of the above statement, it would, as far as it goes, coincide with the scriptural representation of what is the duty of

sinners. The Bible makes no mention of an *external* report in distinction from any *other* report, nor of *natural* faith in distinction from *any other faith; and of sinners being obliged* to exercise one faith and not the other.

"These divines," says a certain writer, "were induced to divide moral and religious duties into two classes—natural and spiritual; comprehending under the latter, those which required spiritual or supernatural assistance to their performance; and under the former, those which demand no such assistance. Agreeable to this distinction, they conceived it to be the duty of all men to abstain from the outward acts of sin, to read the Scriptures, to frequent the worship of God, and to attend with serious assiduity to the means of grace; but they supposed that repentance, faith in Christ, and the exercise of genuine internal devotion were obligatory only on the regenerate. They conceived themselves not warranted to urge the unconverted to repent and believe the gospel, those being spiritual duties, from whose obligation they were released by the inability contracted by the fall."*

These distinctions tend to bewilder and confuse the mind, and to darken "counsel by words without knowledge." Simplicity is the glory of divine revelation, and the more human systems are simplified the nearer they approach, in that respect, to the oracles of God. How plain and simple are the directions and promises of the Bible. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned. He that

* Help to Zion's Travellers—Preface, p. xix.

believeth shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life. The righteousness which is of faith" is neither distant nor obscure, but "nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart: that is the word of faith which we preach. That, if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." The Bible abounds with texts to this purpose, in which I find no mention of *natural* faith, or natural duties of religion, or *external* report of the gospel.

Persons who employ these epithets must have an inward conviction that some duties of religion are binding on man, and that sinners ought to believe the gospel; but fearful lest they should spoil the consistency of their creed by admitting that man is bound to believe with his heart unto righteousness, they employ these qualifying expressions, *natural duties, natural faith, external* report. What can be meant by these terms? I suspect they would find it difficult to explain their own language, or to render it intelligible. If by natural duties and natural faith are intended such duties and such faith as are incumbent upon natural men, this leaves the question entirely untouched; for it would still be asked, *What are they?* They cannot mean such as natural men are disposed to perform, for that would amount to nothing; because man's heart being directly opposed to God and his law, is consequently opposed to every act of duty he may require. Probably, they intend natural duties in opposition to spiritual ones, or the obedience of the heart. If so, the doctrine is unsound and antiscriptural. God requires not bodily service only, but also that of the heart. They that worship him acceptably, must

worship him in spirit and in truth. "My son, give me thine heart." No duties can be pleasing to God where the heart is not engaged. If Jehovah require faith or any other act of duty from man, as his creature, or as a subject of his moral government, he requires it to spring from the heart. Therefore, this distinction of natural duties from those duties which are required of Christians, and performed by them, falls to the ground, as proving nothing or proving too much; and, in either case, useless, if not fatal to the cause it is designed to serve. But it has been asked, "Is it the duty of a sinner to believe *more* than Adam did?" I reply, certainly it is, if he is in different circumstances, and has that revelation which Adam had not. Man is to believe himself a sinner, which Adam could not before he fell; and to believe in Jesus Christ as a Saviour, which Adam could not before the revelation of him was made. It is the duty, therefore, of a sinner favoured with the gospel, to believe *more* than Adam did before he sinned. Nothing can be proved from the various phrases and distinctions adverted to, to overthrow the doctrine or opinion that it is the duty of all who hear the gospel to believe. The faith of God's elect is the truth believed by them; and saving, historical, temporary, speculative, and natural faith, are either distinctions without a difference, or without meaning, or such as may be allowed to be consistent with the obligations of sinners to believe.

LETTER THE THIRD.

Faith defined.—A belief of the Truth.

My dear Friend,

In pursuing the inquiry, *Is it the duty of sinners to believe?* it will be necessary that I should, after having exploded the vain distinctions and phrases employed by those who negative the *inquiry*, state definitively what I mean by *faith* when it is considered as a *duty*.

Could we divest ourselves of all our pre-received opinions respecting faith, and obliterate from our memories the various forms of expression by which it has been defined and distinguished, or, I may say, obscured, we should be at no great loss for a definition of faith. That faith which is connected with the sanctification of the Spirit, and the salvation of the soul, is, in the language of an apostle,—The belief of the Truth.

Every body knows that faith or belief, in the ordinary sense of the word, is that credit which we give to the truth of anything which is made known to us by report or testimony; and is grounded either on the veracity of the speaker, or on the evidence by which his words are confirmed. The word *faith* or *belief* is evidently used by the inspired writers in the same sense in which it is commonly used and understood among men in ordinary cases. They never gave the least hint that they had any uncommon idea annexed to that term, nor did they give any directions how to believe or act faith, though they insist much upon *what* men are to believe, and upon the divine *evidence* of the truth. It is also

remarkable that we do not find any of the first converts inquiring what faith is, or in what manner they were to believe. Hence we may reasonably infer that the apostles used the word *faith* in its ordinary sense, which required no explanation, and that their hearers did, in fact, so understand them.

All truth should be believed, when sufficient evidence is produced, and nothing but truth should obtain credit. Faith in falsehood is the root of mischief. It was the sin of our first parents, and the ruin of their posterity. You perhaps will not object to this, but ask what truth are we to believe. I reply, all truth in general, and the truth of God in particular.

There are some texts of scripture, relating to geography, chronology, history, &c., concerning which men of great learning and talent, as well as others, may entertain different opinions without prejudice to their eternal interests; but these, though *true*, are not THE TRUTH, the belief of which is connected with salvation. "Ye shall know THE TRUTH, and THE TRUTH shall make you free." The truth as it is in Christ, the truth of the gospel, is what we are called to believe at the peril of eternal death. The Holy Ghost has thought proper to give us, in different parts of the Bible, a short epitome of the truth. Such an one is found, John iii. 14—21: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be

saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already; because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God."

Here is a summary of the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which whosoever believes shall be saved. We have other brief but comprehensive passages to the same purpose. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." "I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures." "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." "To him give all the prophets witness, that whosoever believeth in him shall receive the remission of sins." "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh to the Father but by me." "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." The doctrine contained in these Scriptures is with peculiar propriety termed "the truth," "the word of truth," "the word of the truth of the gospel;" and is in substance what is denominated "the gospel," "the faith of the gospel,"

"the common salvation," the faith once delivered to the saints. To understand and believe the facts contained in these simple and plain statements is a belief of the truth, a belief of the gospel, a believing in the Son of God. The whole chain of evangelical truth is inseparably connected with the person and work of Jesus Christ. If language have any determinate meaning, we are plainly taught in the texts above cited, that mankind are sinners, in a lost and perishing condition, without help or hope but what arises from the free grace of God, through the atonement of his Son; that Jesus came into the world in the character of a Surety, and obeyed, suffered, and died, as the representative and substitute of the guilty; that sinners are pardoned and accepted only for the sake of what he hath done and suffered; that in his person and mediation all evangelical truth is concentrated; and that this is the faithful saying, on the reception or rejection of which our eternal destiny depends. If this doctrine be received, Christianity is received; if it is not received, the record God hath given of his Son is rejected, and God himself treated as a liar.

The truth to be believed might be stated in a more creed-like form. It comprises God's testimony concerning himself, in all the revealed perfections of his nature and the purposes of his grace; his testimony concerning man, in his primitive, present, and future state, particularly his present state of guilt, the impurity of his nature, his enmity of heart to God, his aversion to everything holy, his obnoxiousness to the divine displeasure, and the awful ruin of all such as die in unbelief. It comprehends the law in all its purity, spirituality, and extent, with all its

dreadful curses, as denounced against transgressors. By the law is the knowledge of sin. The gospel is also included in this testimony, as made known to all nations for the obedience of faith. It comprehends a revelation of the Son of God in his ancient engagements, his incarnation, obedience, sufferings, and death; his resurrection, ascension to the right hand of God, and his prevalent intercession there; his character and qualifications as an able, all sufficient Saviour, "able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." Hence the perfection of his obedience, and the validity of his atonement, the value and importance of his righteousness and blood, are comprised in *the truth* of the gospel, or *testimony* of God; and constitute, not only an essential, but the most important part of *that truth* or testimony, so that the apostle determined to know nothing as the matter of his ministry, "save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Nor do we exclude from the truth the all-important work and influence of the Holy Spirit, as the exclusive agent in the regeneration and sanctification of the heirs of glory. Now, my dear Friend, have I mentioned anything which ought not to be believed? or, which every sinner who hears the gospel is not bound to believe?

It is not here supposed that, in order to believe to the saving of the soul, a person must necessarily be able accurately to explain and define each particular which has been enumerated; but he believes himself a ruined sinner, and Christ an able Saviour, which two points comprehend all the rest.

True, we are not required to believe what God has not revealed. "The nature of faith is a per-

suasion and assent of the mind arising from testimony or evidence. To believe a thing, means to assent to and give credit to it as true."* "The gospel, or what God testifies, is the matter of faith or the thing believed."†

"Secret things belong to God, but things that are revealed belong to us and to our children, that we may do all the words of this law." Revealed things belong to us as a privilege, but they also belong to us as matter of duty. They are revealed for the obedience of faith, and we are under indubitable obligations to believe. We readily receive the witness of men, but the witness of God is greater, and ought more readily to be received. Care must be taken that we do not substitute our own notions for divine revelations, and then consider our belief of those notions as the faith of the gospel. Real faith supposes the existence and revelation of facts. Believing does not give being to the truth believed, nor any way alter existing facts. These are previously stated, reported, or testified, for the foundation of faith.

From the foregoing remarks it will appear that true faith does not consist in believing that I am elected, or that Christ loved me and gave himself for me; that the Saviour is mine, and I am his; that my sins are pardoned, my person justified, and that I am an heir of God and a joint heir with Jesus Christ. We do not contend for this as the duty of all men who have the Bible. This is the exclusive privilege of true believers in Christ, and not the duty of sin-

* Treatise on the Faith and Hope of the Gospel.

† Ibid. p. 68.

ners. To make faith consist in believing that Christ died for me, is to make a mere proposition the object of my faith, and perhaps a false one too. It is the work of faith in its first act not to believe we are justified, but to rest on the free promise of God, through the alone merit of Christ, that we may be so; not to believe that Christ died for me, but to depend upon him as one that died for sinners.*

Were all unbelievers called to believe that Christ loved them, and gave himself for them, they would be called to believe without evidence; because that is nowhere revealed in the Bible respecting unbelievers. Many may deceive themselves and delude others by supposing that that which was not a truth before it was credited, becomes a truth by their believing it. They say to the ungodly, "Believe that Christ and his righteousness and grace are yours, and they are so." This error should be peculiarly guarded against, as having a dangerous tendency. It leads the sinner to build his hope upon an airy nothing, on a bursting bubble or a sliding sand. Having worked up his mind to appropriate Christ and his salvation as his own, he deems that man his enemy that attempts to teach him the truth as it is in Christ, or in any way endeavours to disturb that false peace which he possesses. If an unbeliever, in the first act of his faith, is taught to believe his *interest* in Christ before he believes in Christ as the all-sufficient Saviour of the guilty, his faith is without foundation in the oracles of God. It is a dangerous thing to consider the nature of true faith to be a full persuasion that the promises of God belong to me,

* *See Hunt on God's Eternal Decrees, &c., p. 230.*

or that it is an assurance of my own particular election.*

There is another class who rest their faith, not on the simple testimony of God, but upon some inward emotions or fancied principles of mind, by which they conceive themselves to be distinguished from their fellow sinners, and as possessing the peculiar marks of God's elect. These generally deny that it is the duty of sinners universally to believe, while, at the same time, they appropriate to themselves the blessings of salvation, as if they were the only peculiar favourites of heaven. Faith of this kind is neither a duty nor a privilege, but a dangerous delusion; and he who is under its influence is feeding "on ashes, a deceived heart hath turned him aside, so that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

"Who more confident than the Pharisees? They had no doubt of God being the Father, and yet who more blind than they? If it be faith to believe our relation to God, to call ourselves *the dear people of his choice*, and appropriate all the blessings of eternal life to ourselves, then the Pharisees had faith in a very eminent degree. But to suppose that faith consists in a firm persuasion of our own interest, is, in effect, the very same thing as to say faith is a believing that we believe."†

Besides, a man may believe that he is elected, redeemed, called, pardoned, justified, &c., and at death find himself miserably and eternally disap-

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* See some very pertinent remarks on this point, by Dr. Hammond, in his Works, under the head of Fundamentals.

† Essays on Grace, Faith, and Experience, by Samuel Ecking, p. 1[illegible]

pointed, unless it is impossible for a man to be self-deceived. Many have thought themselves something when they were nothing. It is not certain that all who believe Christ died for them will be finally saved. Carnal men may, and do, embolden themselves upon false notions to use the most confident expressions about their personal interest in the favour of God; such as, 'I know so surely as that there is a God in heaven, that he is *my* God, and that I shall as surely go to heaven as if I were there, &c.'"*

If men may believe this and yet finally perish, it cannot be denominated saving faith. That faith cannot be very valuable which a man may have and yet be damned. The Arminians, as a body, make it a distinguishing article of their creed, that Jesus loved all men, and gave himself for them, and that redemption by his death is universal. But the utmost stretch of Christian charity would be insufficient to inspire the confidence that all who profess or maintain this sentiment will, without exception, be saved. The opinion that Christ died for all is pretty general among persons who make no pretensions to religion; even the wicked and profligate believe, or suppose they believe, that Christ died for them; but we cannot perceive what benefit they derive from their faith; for it neither purifies their hearts, pacifies their consciences, nor meetens them for glory. Such faith is not the faith of the gospel, nor that which is required of sinners, nor the faith with which salvation is infallibly connected. To believe, therefore, that Christ died for him in particular is not the sinner's first act of faith; nor is it his duty,

* Essays on Grace, Faith, and Experience, by Samuel Ecking.

nor that for the want of which he will be excluded from heaven. It is not of the essence of faith, but a fruit of it. Faith in Christ must precede it, as the parent precedes the child. To believe in Christ, and to believe my interest in Christ, are very different positions. The former, I contend, is an imperative duty; the latter, if well founded and springing from the former, is an unspeakable blessing or privilege. For want of the former, men will be damned and rendered miserable for ever; but none have ever been eternally punished for want of the latter. For a man to believe his interest in Christ as his Saviour without *evidence* of that interest is preposterous. What evidence can any man have before faith in Christ that Christ is his Saviour? It is absurdly placing that before faith which in the very nature of the thing must be subsequent to faith. It is nowhere revealed in the sacred Scriptures respecting any of the sons of Adam that they have, antecedent to their faith, an interest in the obedience and sufferings of Christ. God has not said to any one person, by name, "My Son has laid down his life for thee, and thou hast redemption in his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of my grace." No one, therefore, is called to believe it; nor have they any warrant to believe it, but upon their first believing in Christ. No man, as an unbeliever, can have scriptural evidence of his own personal interest in Christ. He must believe in Christ before he can believe his interest in Christ. "Now the faith of the gospel is not a belief that a man is justified, or shall most certainly be saved, or that Christ died for him in particular, but the belief or believing of the gospel is a persuasion of mind that

the gospel is true; yea, the very truth of God." "Some modern writers have defined faith to be a *confidence that Christ loved me and gave himself for me.* But this is not a true definition of faith. This is not the faith of the gospel, though it hath passed current for it with many for a long time."*

Baxter, giving directions to troubled consciences, says, "that commonly they mistake the nature of faith, and take it to be a *believing that they themselves are forgiven, and in favour with God, and shall be saved;* and because they cannot believe this, therefore they think that they are no believers. Whereas saving faith is nothing but such a *belief that the gospel is true, and Christ the Saviour of the world, as causeth our wills to consent that he be ours and that we be his,* and so to subscribe the covenant of grace."†

"That faith which will cause us to venture upon Christ, and to follow and obey him, preferring heaven to everything else, is saving faith, whatever fears and doubts may attend it."‡

No man is required to believe without evidence. Faith must have attested facts for its foundation. My believing that I am heir apparent to the throne of England will not substantiate my title or right of claim. Thus a man believing he is an heir of God does not constitute him such. He must have grounds to know it before he can rationally believe it, and the unregenerate have no grounds to warrant such a conclusion. We consider persons as insane who assume titles of lords, princes, or kings, and lay

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* Treatise on the Faith and Hope of the Gospel, pp. 52, 53.

† Christian Directory, Part i., pp. 262, 263.

‡ See Religious Melancholy, p. 71.

claims to honours and dominions to which they have no right; and can those that have not believed in Christ be considered as perfectly sane who conclude themselves to be the children of God, members of Christ, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven? "Assurance," says Witsius, "is rather a degree of strong faith than its essence." And, speaking again upon the same subject, he remarks—"We confess that this trust is not justifying faith, but the daughter of justifying faith."*

The faith which is matter of duty is not the faith of appropriation, not a confident persuasion that Christ is mine, that his blood and righteousness are mine, but a belief, upon indubitable evidence, that I am a guilty, needy sinner, ready to perish, and that Christ is an able and willing Saviour. Faith in what God has testified respecting man, as guilty, wretched, and ruined, and respecting Christ, as a willing and all-sufficient Saviour, is what is required by the moral Governor of the world.

The proper object of saving faith is the testimony of God concerning his Son: that there is life in him for perishing souls, and whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This declaration all to whom the gospel is published are morally bound to believe and approve. Accordingly the true meaning of saving faith is not a strong persuasion that our sins are pardoned, but a persuasion of mind that the gospel method of salvation is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, and an embracing of Christ, as therein held forth, with our whole heart, in order that

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* Irenicum, chap. ix., sec. 5—11.

our sins *may be* pardoned. Hence faith is represented as *looking* and *coming* to Christ.*

One writer says that faith is a "right disposition of a sinner towards Christ. It is a state of the heart. The state of the heart must not be excluded from our idea of faith."† This definition, with some additional explanation, may be correct.

The believing sinner is convinced that he is self-destroyed, under the curse of a righteous law, and that no being in heaven or earth, except the Lord Jesus Christ, can save or deliver him from impending ruin. But under a persuasion of the Lord's ability and readiness to save to the uttermost, he flies for refuge to the hope set before him, and, renouncing all confidence built upon his own experience or life, he betakes himself to Christ, as revealed in the gospel, or, in other words, embraces the truth, or receives the witness of God, and believes the record he has given of his Son. This, I conceive, is the duty of every sinner to whom the word of salvation is sent. Surely it ought not to be controverted whether man is bound to believe the truth respecting himself and respecting the Saviour, more especially when it is attested by Him who cannot lie.

To the obligation of men universally to believe the gospel it has been objected that—

"As God hath not elected all mankind, and as Christ hath not died for all who hear the gospel, how can we suppose that he calls all to faith and repentance and invites them to partake of salvation?"

* See Bennett on the Gospel, p. 228.

† Hinton's Theology, pp. 115, 116. See Mc Lean's Works, vol. i. p. 90.

To this objection, Mr. Mc Lean has answered thus:—

1. "Consider, in the *first* place, that although God does not intend to save all mankind, yet it is the *duty* of all who hear the gospel to repent and believe it, and their sin to do otherwise, and that independent of any consideration of God's secret design or purpose. His secret purpose belongs to himself: it is his revealed will that constitutes our obligation, and is the rule of our duty towards him. God's secret purpose does not diminish the guilt of sin, neither does it diminish or increase the obligation to duty, so that whether men are elected or not, it is equally their duty to repent and believe the gospel, and they are, therefore, properly called to do so.

2. "All who believe the gospel shall be saved. This is the promise of God, and is therefore his revealed purpose. 'This is the will of Him that sent me,' said Jesus, 'that every one who seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day.'—John vi. 40. If, therefore, it is a truth that all, without exception, who believe shall be saved, then it must be proper and consistent that all, without exception, should be called to believe, and so invited to partake of a free salvation, for Christ says, 'Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.'

3. "If the calls and invitations of the gospel were not addressed universally to all who hear it, but restricted to the elect, then none could warrantably obey these calls till they knew that they were elected; but it is impossible for them to know this till they obey the call. The elect must believe upon the common grounds laid for all men, and not upon any thing peculiar to them as elect; and so the

gospel calls and invitations must be *universal*, and must respect men merely as sinners for the sake of the elect themselves, though to them only they are made effectual."*

I remain, &c.

LETTER THE FOURTH.

Faith, the Gift of God, and the Duty of Man.

My dear Friend,

The conclusion of my last may prompt you to inquire whether any sinner ever did heartily believe the gospel unaided and uninfluenced by the Holy Spirit? This inquiry I answer in the negative. I believe no one sinner ever did so since the day that Adam first transgressed the law of God. This concession only amounts to this, that no sinner has ever done what he ought to have done. And is not this a fact? But surely this, being a fact, does not destroy his obligation. Man is obliged to love God. Though he does not love, but, on the contrary, hates him, still love to God is an imperative duty. Only let disobedience absolve from obligation, and you at once destroy all duty, render the bond of obedience powerless, and make the neglect of divine injunctions innocent. There are many other duties, besides faith, incumbent upon man, which none of the sinful sons of Adam ever performed until renewed by the Spirit of God; but it will not, it cannot follow from hence, that they ought not to have performed them, or that the neglect of them is not

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* Mc Lean on the Calls and Invitations of the Gospel.

highly criminal. "The *obligation* of men to *credit* the testimony of God concerning his Son unto eternal life, and cordially to receive Christ as the unspeakable gift of God, is not to be estimated by their moral ability, good inclination, or a well-disposed mind, but by their natural capacity of understanding and will, with unrestrained freedom, and by the moral means held forth by the supreme Governor, as adapted in themselves, and according to their moral tendency, to do us good and make us blessed."* Wherever true faith is found I am willing to acknowledge it to be the offspring of Jehovah. It is of the operation of God. None ever possessed it but those to whom it was given to believe. Faith is the gift of God; and hence the apostles, convinced of this fact, said, "Lord, increase our faith." It is not produced by human might or power, but by the Spirit of the Lord. The Holy Spirit gives eyes to see the truth, and a heart to embrace it. He not only gives the ground and object of faith, but also the disposition to believe. Faith is a plant of his own right hand planting. Yet the Holy Spirit does not believe for us. Faith is not his act, but ours. He removes the darkness of the mind and subdues the enmity of the heart, and communicates a disposition to believe; but we ourselves act under his influence; otherwise, there could not either blame or praise attach to our actions. The same may be affirmed respecting every holy principle and action. Love to God is essential to true religion, yet that is produced by the Holy Ghost, who sheds it abroad in our hearts. But the Holy Ghost does not love Jehovah for us, but

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* Dr. Williams's Essay, pp. 198, 199.

directs our hearts into the love of God. Repentance is given by Christ, but it is the sinner that repents, not Christ, or the Holy Spirit. Faith is the gift of God, and so are love and repentance; faith is not, therefore, any less the duty of man than love and repentance are. There is nothing contradictory in the idea that the same thing may be the gift of God and the duty of man.* The reason of this is obvious. Man will not, if left to himself, perform what is enjoined upon him. But God, in the riches of his grace, has determined that he shall walk in his statutes, and do them. Hence, he works in him "both to will and to do of his good pleasure." This is the sum of the divine promises:—"They *shall* be my people, and I will be their God; and I will give them one heart and one way; I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." He works "all the good pleasure of his goodness" in them, "and the work of faith with power;" and then they, as in duty bound, work out their "own salvation with fear and trembling."

The sinner's alienation of heart from God, and his enmity to divine truth, are such, that he will not attend to his duty, he will not seek after God. God is not in all his thoughts. He will not come to Christ, nor believe on his name, nor submit to his government. Light is come into the world, life and salvation are published, but the sinner loves darkness rather than light, because his deeds are evil. This is their condemnation, that they reject the counsel of God against themselves, and, from the state of their minds, will continue to do so till they are made new creatures in Christ Jesus. They have an

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* See Bennett on the Gospel, p. 225.

aversion of heart to their duty. They neither love nor fear God, neither repent of sin nor believe the gospel. Though all to whom the gospel is sent are under the strongest moral obligations to believe it, yet not one will ever believe with the heart unto righteousness till renewed or changed by Almighty influence. I maintain, therefore, that faith is the gift of God, and yet that all men who have the gospel ought to believe, and that all unbelievers deserve to perish.

If, then, no sinner ever did, or ever will discharge his duty without supernatural aid, it will be asked, "Where is the necessity or propriety of insisting upon it or exhorting sinners to do it?" This inquiry amounts to the same thing as if it were asked, "Why should you urge drunkards to be sober, or thieves to be honest, when you know they never will without a change of mind?" On this principle, all exhortation to duty would be at an end, and every man would be left to do what is right in his own eyes, without control and without guilt. Where there is no law, there can be no transgression. If man is under no previous obligation to believe, before he does actually believe, then it will follow that he cannot be criminal in not believing, and that when he believes, he does that which it was not his duty to do. But this conclusion would annul the whole volume of inspiration, and outrage all reason and common sense.

I am, &c.

LETTER THE FIFTH.

Faith virtually required by the law of God, and consequently the Duty of Man.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Having in my former letters endeavoured to define faith, and to shew that, where it is exercised, it is the gift of God, I shall now attempt to prove, notwithstanding this concession, that faith is the indispensable duty of man. Many things, it will be admitted, are the duty of man which men in general do not perform. Every man ought to speak the truth, to be sober, and to pay his just debts, though every one has not a heart to do so. Every man ought to believe the testimony of God, though all men have not faith.

"Men are under indispensable obligations to believe whatever God says, and to do whatever he commands; and a Saviour being revealed in the gospel, the law in effect requires those to whom he is made known to believe in him, seeing it insists upon obedience to the whole revealed will of God; —that no rational creature can justly claim exemption from obligation, or is at liberty to do what he please, to believe or not believe what God declares, to comply or not comply with what he enjoins; for were that the case, he would have no occasion to give an account of his conduct to the Judge of all the earth;—that the inability of man to comply with the divine requirements is wholly of a moral nature, and totally distinct from the want of natural faculties; that it consists in the prevalence of an evil disposition, or in blindness and hardness

of heart; that though, while this disordered state of mind exists, it will prevent a compliance with the divine requirements, as certainly as any physical privation, yet, being voluntary, it becomes in the highest degree criminal; and that legitimate commands, enforced by proper sanctions, being amongst the strongest motives, and tending in their own nature to incline the will, they cannot be withheld without virtually relinquishing the claim of divine authority and dominion.

"These sentiments are discussed in several distinct propositions, and supported by a weight of scriptural evidence sufficient to silence all objections. The author then adverts to the doctrine of divine decrees—the nature of man's original holiness—particular redemption—the covenant of works—the inability of man—and the necessity of a divine principle in order to believing; proving the consistency of the indefinite calls of the gospel with these and other admitted parts of the Calvinistic system."*

This is a summary, as given by Morris, of the principles maintained by Mr. Fuller, in his treatise, entitled, "The Gospel worthy of all acceptation, or the duty of sinners to believe in Jesus Christ."

It is a fact, though it may be viewed as matter of astonishment, that some professed Christians have contended that faith is not a duty, and that sinners, though favoured with the gospel, are not obliged to believe it. But is not such a sentiment at equal variance with reason and revelation? What can be more reasonable than that when the God of eternal truth speaks, he should be believed? and does not

* Fuller's Memoirs, by Morris, pp. 270, 271.

every page of the Bible, directly or indirectly, require man to believe his Maker? Texts might be quoted, both from the Old and the New Testament, almost without number, inviting, exhorting, and commanding men to believe, and threatening with the pains of eternal death all who dare to disbelieve the record God has given of his Son. Read, and seriously consider the passages referred to in the margin.* Faith is represented as an act of obedience, which it could not be if it was not a duty. The gospel is made known for the obedience of faith. To obey the truth and to believe are one and the same. "But they have not all obeyed the gospel; for Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?" In short, as a certain writer saith, "Freedom from condemnation, and eternal life, are promised to him that believeth; and condemnation, the wrath of God, and everlasting destruction are threatened against such as believe not. Doth not this, in the most striking manner, demonstrate that God approves of believing, and is highly displeased at unbelief, and consequently that the former is a duty and the latter a sin?"†

I shall now place before you a few arguments to prove that it is the indispensable duty of sinners to whom the gospel is published, to give it a cordial reception, or to believe in Christ for life and salvation.

The original law of nature lays mankind under

* Isa. xlv. 21, 22; compare Rom. xiv. 10, 11; Isa. lv. 1—7; Matt. iii. 5—13; Acts xix. 4; John iii. 14, 20, 36; Mark i. 15; xvi. 15, 16; Matt. xxii. 2—15; Luke xiv. 16—24; John vii. 37, 38; 2 Cor. v. 18—21; Acts xxvi. 20; John xv. 22—24; Rom. x. 3; 1 John v. 10.

† Jones's Biblical Cyclopædia—Art. *Faith.*

unchanging and unlimited obligations to believe whatever God may at any time, with sufficient evidence of its truth, reveal unto them, as well as to obey whatever he may enjoin or command.

Was not Adam in Paradise obliged to believe whatever God might say to him? It cannot be supposed for a moment that the creature could have any right to dispute the truth or disbelieve the word of his Creator. Antecedent to all revelation, the relation subsisting between man and his Maker must impose it as an imperative duty upon the former to believe the latter. And the same reason remains in full force with respect to every human being to whom any revelation from God is given. Only let it be proved that God has spoken, and the obligation to believe cannot reasonably be disputed. It would be singularly strange, indeed, if any intelligent, responsible creature, either man or angel, had a right to discredit or disregard any message coming from the Lord. The very law of creation and the nature of things, apart from divine revelation, abundantly testify the creature's obligation to believe divine testimony, to whatever extent it may be afforded. . . .

The law of God, generally called the moral law, most certainly requires all who are under it, and to whom it is revealed, to believe the testimony of God.

If the law requires faith, unbelievers are bound to believe. "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law." By the *moral law* I understand, not simply the letter of the two tables given to Israel, but the obligations arising from the creature's dependence upon God and the relations he bears to him and to his fellow-creatures.

The Decalogue is generally considered as the moral law; but we shall, in my opinion, greatly curtail and limit moral obligation if we look to no other directory. Are there not many duties incumbent upon mankind which cannot, without a forced and extended application or interpretation of the ten commandments, be referred to them? "What, then, is the law of God in which his requirements are embodied? I conceive that it is not to be found in the ten commandments; which, however honourable and important among the precepts of God, have no just pretensions to be considered as a summary of his law; nor can I refrain from expressing my conviction of the immense mischief which has arisen from their having been regarded in this light."*

"The moral law is not, as generally imagined, some separate thing which may be abstractedly considered, without any reference to the characters of God and of man; but its very existence, extent, and degree of obliging power bear an exact proportion to these characters in connexion with the representations which God makes of himself to man, and the benefits conferred upon him. In himself God is always the same, but men have different capacities, moral means, and opportunities."† Hence moral obligation is commensurate to the circumstances of men. To whom much is given, of him much is required. The sum and spirit of the moral law the Redeemer has expressed, in reply to the question, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said unto him, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and

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* Hinton's Harmony, p. 107.

† Dr. Williams's Essay, p. 143.

with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment: and the second is like unto it—Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Here is a direct command to love God. This command is general, and it is universally binding upon all to whom it is made known. Every man ought to love God with all his heart. But can any man thus love God and not believe him? There cannot be any real love to God but in proportion to our knowledge of him and belief of his excellency. I must know God as just, true, faithful, and merciful, before I can love him as such. And can I thus know and love him, and yet not give credit to his testimony? Nay, can I so conceive of him and not be under the strongest obligations to believe whatever he may reveal, whether law or gospel, whether precept or promise? To consider and declare the LORD to be true and faithful, and yet not to be under obligation to believe him, is a paradox and mystery beyond my comprehension. How can I love a Being whom I dare not, or am not bound to believe? There cannot be any proper love to God but in proportion to faith in him and in his word. If the law quoted be considered as the natural, necessary, unchanging rule of obedience, arising from the relation subsisting between God and his creatures, and from the circumstances in which his creatures are placed, it will follow that all duty is virtually contained in the law, and that, therefore, if faith be the duty of any man, it is so by virtue of the divine law. And if the law of God require faith of any one man under the gospel, it must require faith of all men in similar circumstances.

It will perhaps be said, that the law may require faith in God, as the Creator and Preserver of men, and as the God of providence, but that the law knows nothing of Christ, and, therefore, cannot require faith in him. In reply, it may be affirmed, that the law requires many things virtually which are not, in so many words, expressly and explicitly commanded. Has not God given a record concerning his Son? and is not this his commandment, "That we should believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another as he gave us commandment"? If God reveal a Saviour, we are bound by virtue of a previous obligation to believe all that he testifies concerning that Saviour. Strange, if we are under a law to believe God when he reveals himself as the Creator, and are not under obligation to believe him when he speaks as a Saviour. Surely the law requires us to believe the whole, and not simply a part of what God reveals. If we are not obliged to believe in Christ, because the law, in the light most people expound it, does not expressly require faith in Christ, may we not, upon the same principle, deny our obligations to the performance of a large proportion of what have been considered moral duties, and binding upon mankind? Where do the ten commandments require, in so many words, the exercise of gratitude for favours received, humility, self-denial, benevolence to the poor, mercy to the miserable, &c., &c.? Yet these are duties incumbent upon us, and that by the authority of the moral law. To look to the two tables of stone exclusively, as the rule of duty, would involve us in serious and inextricable difficulties in expounding the divine word. Faith in Christ may be virtually required by the immutable law of God

though not expressly commanded. We cannot conceive that rational creatures are at liberty, without great criminality, to reject the testimony of God respecting the only Saviour. God is made a liar when the record he has given of his Son is not believed. If unbelief be a sin, it must be a transgression of the law; but it cannot be a transgression of the law unless the law requires faith, for where there is no law to make faith a duty, there can be no law to make unbelief a sin. I do not consider the ten commandments, as recorded in Exodus and Deuteronomy, as exclusively the moral law, or the rule of life to believers or unbelievers, but have spoken of them in this connexion in conformity to common opinion.

An acute writer in the northern part of our island has expressed my views upon this subject. He remarks, "Whatever was enjoined in the law of Moses, or in the prophets, was comprehended in these two commandments, (Matt. xxii. 40.) As pity to the poor and love to enemies are included in the one, so are faith and repentance in the other. For it binds the rational creature to believe whatever God reveals, and to obey whatever he enjoins."*

Though the Bible is the only book to which we look for a full and final decision of all matters respecting faith and practice, yet the opinions of wise and good men, who have made the Bible their principal study, may not be altogether slighted. And among fallible writers, perhaps, Witsius and his commentator, Mr. Bell, deserve as large a share of our attention as any. I shall, therefore, make some farther quotations from Mr. Bell, to corroborate what I have already advanced.

* Bell's Notes to Witsius's Irenicum, note 13

"The law does not bind us to repent till we have sinned, nor to believe in Christ till he be revealed; yet as soon as we have committed the one, or have heard of the joyful sound concerning the other, we are bound by the law to repent and believe; otherwise impenitence and unbelief would be no transgression to the moral law.

"Faith is commanded by the law; not taught. It is taught by the gospel; not commanded. Obligation is from the law. That man would not believe in Christ before he fell, was not owing to his want of ability, but to the want of revelation.*

"Repentance must always be the sinner's duty, i. e., to sorrow for sin and to turn from it. Once to deny this would be to vindicate rebellion against God."†

"By the old, or original, law of his creation, man was certainly bound to believe whatever God should reveal, and to obey whatever he should enjoin. It cannot be denied that such obligations must result from the relation between God and the rational creature. Hence, soon as the Saviour was exhibited in the glorious gospel, fallen man was bound by the old, the original law, to believe all that was revealed, and to obey all that was enjoined respecting him. The moment that the gospel revealed the new object, the law obliged him to the new duty in relation to it. The commandment is not exceeding broad, if it do not extend to all possible duty, and particularly to faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, and all the duties which sup-

* Bell's Notes to Witsius's Irenicum, pp. 231, 232, note 13.

† Ibid. p. 358, note 20.

pose our fallen state, or the revelation of the gospel."*

"We maintain that faith is commanded in the law, not in express words, indeed, but by necessary consequence. For the law commands us to love God with all our heart, and to obey him in all things, and therefore to believe him when speaking, whatever it may be which he says or enjoins. Adam was bound to have faith in God, and to believe God would be faithful to his promises. Nor does our obligation to believe the gospel arise from anything else than from that first obligation by which man, before he sinned, was bound to believe every word of God. Certain it is, that man is bound by the law to believe every word of God."

"In vain it is objected, that faith in Christ was not commanded to Adam before the fall, for neither was he forbidden to mix with idolaters, &c."

"When the apostle says that "the law is not of faith," his meaning is not that faith is in no respect enjoined in the law, but that justification by faith in Christ is neither taught nor promised in the law."†

"The law is perfect, requiring the utmost perfection of every duty. And if so, it must certainly require faith in Jesus Christ and repentance unto life."‡

To these accurate and scriptural remarks I subjoin the testimony of an English divine of the present day.

* Bell's Notes to Witsius's Irenicum, p. 332, note 33

† From Du Moulin, by Bell.

‡ Bell's Notes to Witsius's Irenicum, pp. 333—336, note 33. Abridged.

It would be strange indeed to imagine that rational, accountable creatures should be at liberty to think lightly of, and reject, the provisions of sovereign grace, without contracting any guilt or danger on that account. Reason at once concludes that what is so worthy of acceptation must both deserve and indispensably require a suitable reception by every individual to whom it is revealed.

"Some evangelical preachers forbear to inforce it as the duty of sinners to believe in Christ for salvation. Thus, under the idea of exhibiting more clearly the riches and freeness of sovereign grace, they let slip the special medium of conviction, by which the understanding and conscience of unbelievers are to be scripturally addressed."*

"If faith in Christ for salvation be not an act of obedience to the gospel, unbelief cannot be considered as an act of disobedience to it. Men are universally under a moral obligation to comply with the whole of God's revealed will, and believing in Christ in order to salvation is a part of that revealed will, and indefinitely required of those amongst whom the gospel is published."†

Before I can relinquish as untenable the opinion that sinners are required to believe in Christ, I must see these quotations fairly and scripturally met and overturned. Of this, however, I have no expectation.

I am, &c.

* See Bennett on the Gospel Dispensation, p. 111.

† Ibid.

LETTER THE SIXTH.

Faith is a duty, or unbelief is no sin.

My dear Friend,

That faith is a duty appears from the consideration that unbelief is uniformly represented in the Bible as the sinner's crime, and the ground of his final condemnation. To assert that unbelief is the *only* ground of condemnation would be saying too much, as it would convey an idea that those who have not the gospel could not be condemned, and that no other sin under the gospel is worthy of death. But if it constitute a ground of criminality in connexion with other sins, which surely will not be denied, it establishes the position that faith is a duty. For where there are no obligations to any exercise, the omission cannot be a crime; and where there is no crime there cannot justly be punishment. If faith and repentance be not duties, then the want of them can never be a ground of condemnation. But such is my conviction of the criminality of unbelief, when compared with other sins, that I have no hesitation in affirming that among the hearers of the gospel none will be finally condemned excepting those who die in unbelief, or without faith *Only* "he that believeth not shall be damned." "He that believeth shall never perish, but shall have everlasting life." No other sin can finally ruin us if we are not guilty of unbelief. But "he that believeth not hath made God a liar, and is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

"Unbelief sets all the glory and excellency of

Christ at nought. It often appears strange to natural men that unbelief should be spokèn of as such a heinous and crying sin. They cannot see such evil in it. There are other sins which often trouble their consciences, when this troubles them not at all, though it be that which brings far greater guilt upon them than those sins about which they are more troubled. Unbelief is spoken of as a heinous sin, (John iii. 18, xvi. 9; and 1 John v. 10,) for thereby all the glory of Christ is set at nought. Unbelief treats the excellency of Christ as being of less value than the meanest earthly enjoyments."*

"This is the condemnation," i. e., the reason or ground of condemnation, "that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." If God speak truth, it must be highly criminal not to believe him; and such is the enormity of the sin of unbelief, that it procures the heaviest punishment. Hence the Saviour denominates those who inhabit some of the deepest pits of misery as hypocrites and *unbelievers*.

"Unbelief is nothing but the attempt of sin and Satan to frustrate the whole design of God, to make him a liar, to keep him from being known and worshipped, as God only wise, infinitely righteous, holy, faithful, gracious, and bountiful. And can this atheistical, rebellious attempt be too severely revenged? Is not God not only *justified* in that decretory sentence, "He that believeth not shall be damned," but doth it not, even in the hearts of all the creation, call aloud for the vindication of his glory from this great contempt cast upon it, and

* President Edwards's Works, vol. vii. p. 433.

horrible attempt to frustrate his design for the advancement of it? As sure as God is God unbelief shall not go unpunished."*

Indeed, unbelief is not only in itself a sin, but a parent of sin; not only a ground of condemnation, but that which binds the guilt of all our other sins upon us. It is the root from whence they proceed, and that which sustains all their direful consequences. It would not be difficult to point out here how faith promotes purity, and how unbelief nourishes crime, were not the matter too obvious to need proof.

"Unbelief is the *immediate root* and cause of all provoking sins. As faith is the spring of all obedience, so is unbelief of all sin. All sins of flesh and spirit have no other root."†

But if unbelief be a sin, and the parent of sin and of future misery, it must undeniably follow that faith is a duty. To represent unbelief as a sin, and faith not to be a duty, is a species of argumentation which I cannot comprehend. If I am not under obligation to have faith, to be destitute of it cannot be my crime. I would ask, in the name of common sense, how can I be guilty for not having or not exercising that which it is not my duty to possess, or to exercise? This question cannot be evaded by admitting, with Dr. Gill and others, that it is the duty of sinners to have a natural or historical faith, or some sort of faith, but not *saving* faith; and that, therefore, their unbelief is criminal in that respect. This evasion has been already removed. Whatever different views of faith the Bible may exhibit does not at all affect the present question, because the faith and unbelief which are the subject of our present discussion

* Dr. Owen on Heb. iii. 15—19. † Ibid.

are connected with our eternal happiness or misery. Heaven or hell will be our everlasting abode, according as we die in faith or unbelief. "If ye believe not that I am he," says the Saviour, "ye shall die in your sins, and where I am thither ye cannot come." It is implied here that not to believe in Jesus was offensive and criminal, and would exclude them from heaven; and that if they did believe they should not die in their sins; or, in other words, they should be pardoned and saved. It is only on this interpretation that we can perceive the propriety of the language. The Redeemer could not mean that they should die in their sins if they believed not, and that they should die in their sins if they did believe. It appears, therefore, very clearly, that the Son of God enjoined faith upon the peril of eternal misery, or eternal separation from himself; and represented unbelief as the ground of condemnation and punishment. Unbelievers must, therefore, have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone for ever and ever. On this ground we contend that faith is the incumbent duty of every one who has access to the Bible, or unbelief could not be a sin.

"If it be not the duty of every one who hears the gospel to believe it, unbelief cannot be their sin, and it is no crime to break the first and great commandment. If we are not bound in duty to believe the gospel, are we under any obligation to believe *any part* of God's word? If we are, what part? If not, then we are under no obligation at all to observe any one thing that is commanded therein. Deism of consequence is no crime, and Christianity a mere farce."* I remain, &c.

* Essays on Grace, Faith, and Experience, by Samuel Ecking.

LETTER THE SEVENTH.

Faith is a duty, or sinners are released from all obligation, and nothing is matter of duty.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

That faith is the duty of men wherever the gospel comes, is clear, from the consideration that no other duty can be performed acceptably to God without faith. This is evident from an express declaration of holy writ—" Without faith it is impossible to please God." To exclude faith, then, from the list of duties, and, as the necessary result, unbelief from the list of crimes, would be to abolish the great distinction between sin and holiness, and to expel the grounds of blame and praise from our world. If faith is not obligatory on man, nothing can be duty; because, without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith is essential to the right performance of any command; for none surely will maintain that sinners are released from all obligation, or, that God requires nothing from them. Are they not called upon to love God, and to love their neighbour? Is it not their duty to forsake sin, to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, to be thankful for the mercies they have received, to read and study the sacred Scriptures, to attend upon a place of worship where the gospel is preached, and to pray to God for such blessings as a guilty sinner needs? Should not sinners be exhorted to these duties, and be called upon to forsake the foolish, and live?* " Prayer and worship are duties arising from

* Prov. ix.

the discoveries which God has made of himself in his works of creation and providence, and from man's relation to his Creator, and his dependence upon him for his being and support. The gospel does not set aside any of the natural grounds of worship, but rather establishes them. The scripture commands the *wicked* and *unrighteous* to seek the Lord."* Can any one of these duties be performed aright without faith ? But if they are attended to at all, they should be performed according to the will of God. No one would wish or exhort sinners to attend to them in an improper manner. It is not a bare external attendance upon means that will please God or profit the soul. Religious acts must be done in faith, or they are not performed to any good purpose. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." We can derive no benefit from a preached gospel, unless we mix faith with what we hear. He that comes to God must believe that he is, and must pray in faith, or he can receive nothing from the Lord. No works can be acceptable to God unless they spring from faith. As faith without works is dead, being alone; so works without faith are dead. They are a body without a soul, a well without water. It clearly follows that if faith be not a duty, nothing whatever can be binding upon man, inasmuch as every act of holy obedience must include faith. On the principle here opposed, it cannot be the sinner's duty to repent, because repentance includes faith, and faith is not a duty. It cannot be the duty of a sinner to love God, because love to God supposes faith, and it is not the sinner's duty to believe. Man is under no obligation to pray,

* McLean on the Calls and Invitations of the Gospel.

because faith is essential to prayer, and man is not obliged to possess faith. Patience and submission under the afflicting hand of God cannot be required of sinners, for these dispositions suppose the exercise of faith, but faith not being a duty, sinners are released from obligation to them. To exhort to these, or any other Christian duty, without faith, is glaringly contradictory to the Bible, and fraught with absurdity. It is expecting a rootless tree to bear fruit. Faith is the immediate source and the living root of all acceptable obedience.

The Scriptures speak of man as a being destined to exist for ever. His present state is only an introduction to an eternal one, in which boundless and permanent happiness or misery will be his portion. Is it not, then, the duty of every sinner to be concerned for the salvation of his soul? But this concern can be of no use any farther than it is the fruit of faith. Therefore, it is his duty to believe in Christ for salvation. Conviction of guilt and depravity, if it can be experienced unaccompanied by faith, can only tend to despondency and despair. He that is concerned for salvation will naturally want something in which he may safely confide. Can it be his duty to trust in himself, his prayers, his works, and his experience? These are not a safe ground of confidence for a poor guilty sinner. Nothing that he can do or suffer will make an atonement for his guilt, or provide him a justifying righteousness in the sight of God. He cannot, therefore, place any confidence in himself, nor can any created being deliver him from the damnation of hell. Should he then trust in Christ, and rely exclusively upon him as the ground of his acceptance before God? Is this a matter of duty or not?

He must either rely for eternal salvation upon Christ, upon himself, or upon nothing. Which is the path of duty? The Bible represents the danger of self-confidence. There is nothing *in* the sinner, or *done* by him, or that *can* be done or *suffered* by him, which can be a foundation for his hope. Nay, he is forbidden to rest, in whole or in part, upon works of righteousness performed by himself; "for by the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified." It is not his duty to rest on any thing but Christ; and if it is not his duty to believe in Jesus, and to trust in him for salvation and eternal life, he is left at once without any object in which he may safely confide; nay, he must be without obligation and without sin, and, therefore, without blame or punishment. How different is all this to the language of inspiration! It calls upon the sinner to renounce self, and to believe in Jesus Christ, (Rom. x. 3—10,) and blames him for his neglect of Christ and his great salvation, while it invites him to come to the gospel feast, (Isa. lv. 1—7.) The gospel is a hope set before sinners, to which they are invited to flee. It is to them what the city of refuge was to the manslayer, or what the brazen serpent was to the dying Israelites. But if it is not their duty to flee for refuge, nor to look to Christ, as the antetype of the brazen serpent, these figures lose all their beauty and meaning.

If faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God, then the gospel must be addressed to unconverted men, or it cannot be the power of God to their salvation. For how can they believe in Christ and his gospel, unless they are proclaimed to them. It is, therefore, the sinner's duty, and his unspeakable privilege, to hear and believe the gos-

pel, and at his peril to despise it. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

If faith in Christ be not a duty, why find fault with the wicked for their conduct, or with professors of religion who have embraced erroneous notions of the person and work of the Saviour? The city and the country abound with impenitent and unbelieving sinners. Blasphemers, sabbath-breakers, swearers, drunkards, liars, extortioners, and whoremongers, are to be found in great numbers in many parts of the world, and also in Great Britain. But what can be said to them if they are not under obligation to believe? May we tell them to refrain from their sins and go to hell a little more decently—that it will be better for them, and their sufferings will be less hereafter? Certainly their reformation would benefit society, but it could have no connexion with the salvation of the soul if it sprung not from faith. Besides, the self-righteous are not obliged to be otherwise than self-righteous if it is not their duty to believe in Christ. Why, then, should such characters be blamed either for error, or immorality, or legality?

If Socinians, for instance, are not bound to believe in Christ, and to believe *aright* concerning him to the saving of the soul, why cannot they be passed by without censure? As they are under no obligation to believe *aright*, they may surely, without molestation, be suffered to believe *wrong*. If faith is not their duty, to what shall we exhort them? Not to embrace Christ, for that includes faith, which is said not to be their duty. Shall we exhort them to reject Christ? It surely cannot be a sin to reject the Saviour if men are not bound to receive him. Shall we, then, exhort them to be neutral, and

neither to embrace nor despise Christ, but, in reference to the language of Balak, "Neither bless him at all, nor curse him at all"? But this is not possible. "He that is not with me, is against me." Is there any way of escape from the dilemma into which this strange system plunges its advocates? Is it of no moment whether right opinions be formed of the person and righteousness of Christ, nor whether suitable dispositions of mind be cultivated or entertained? Are the persons who represent him as a mere man or a created God, and esteem him only as such, to be considered innocent in this respect? And shall those be exempt from blame who renounce the atonement, and represent the blood of the Saviour as destitute of efficacy to take away sin? It will undoubtedly follow, that if it is not their duty to entertain true and correct ideas of Christ, and suitable feelings towards him, they cannot be blame-worthy for indulging the contrary. To shift the question to some *kind* of faith with which salvation is not connected, does not at all remove the difficulty; because, even then, the language must be—"If ye believe not ye must be damned; and you must be damned, even if you do believe or exercise that faith which it is your duty to possess, because that faith is not, on your own shewing, connected with the salvation of the soul. On this principle, faith makes no difference, for whether you are believers or unbelievers you must perish." Such a sentiment, I imagine, is utterly unscriptural, as it leaves no ground whatever to find fault with unbelief, or even with immorality. Indeed, I do not see how the advocates of the system here opposed can, with any consistency or propriety, reprove either the immoral, the self-

righteous, the Socinian, or even the Deist. All their reproofs and censures are totally irreconcileable with their creed. How can they be blamed for be lieving and acting wrong, who are under no obligation to believe and act aright?

I am, &c.

LETTER THE EIGHTH.

Some of the consequences of denying faith to be the sinner's duty.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

A train of the most gloomy and awful consequences inseparably follow upon a denial that faith is a sinner's duty.

We have already remarked, that if faith is not a duty, unbelief cannot be a sin; nor can this assertion, though trite and common, be successfully controverted. The various evasions about different kinds of faith are futile and irrelevant, as has been already shewn. An opponent may admit some kind of faith to be the sinner's duty, and its opposite to be sin; but it will be said, that he does not mean saving faith. On the same ground I may reply that its opposite is not damning unbelief. For if the duty is not connected with salvation, the omission of it cannot be cause of damnation. Faith and unbelief are opposites; and if the former is not saving, the latter cannot be damning; or, if the one is connected with damnation, the other must be connected with salvation. However, any way, on the principle I oppose, the man must be lost; for if he believes according to duty, it is not saving faith, and if he believes not he must be damned. Unless, indeed, our opponents invert the order of things

settled in the Bible, and affirm, He that believeth according to his duty shall be damned, and he that believeth not shall be—shall be what?—saved. Awful case, miserable dilemma! That any one should dispute the criminality of unbelief is amazing. To doubt the veracity of God, to refuse to confide in his Son, is a crime surely of no ordinary magnitude. God has resented it in all ages of the church. It is a sin threatened with everlasting punishment. Jehovah has even engaged his most solemn oath, particularly and exclusively, against this sin.

"The oath of God is engaged against no sin but unbelief. As God has given his oath for the confirmation and consolation of believers, both as to the things themselves which they are to believe, and as to their assured safety on their believing, and to nothing else directly in a way of grace; so he hath, in a way of justice, engaged his oath against no sin but that of unbelief, and for the exclusion of unbelievers from eternal rest. 'To whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but *to them that believed not?*' Other sins there are that have great provocations in them; so had the murmurings of the people in the wilderness. But it is their relation to unbelief, their growing upon *that stock*, that gives them such an height of provocation as that God at any time enters a caveat against them by his *oath.* And in this sense it is not said amiss, that unbelief is the only damning sin; because as there is no other sin but *may* be, but *shall* be, remitted to men upon believing; so the formal consideration, on which other sins in gospel hearers fall under judgment, is unbelief."*

* Dr. Owen on Heb. iii. 15—19.

It was this crime that excluded the Israelites from the earthly Canaan, and it will shut out all its subjects from the heavenly paradise.. "They could not enter in because of unbelief;" and he that dies an unbeliever, will find his portion where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched, (Heb. iii. 18, 19.)

The commands and threatenings with which the Bible abounds would be pointless on the principle that faith is not the duty of man. But the word of God is not a "leaden rule that will take any form which human inclination may give it. The authority of God is not to be bent and contorted by the hand of man."* They who refuse his invitations shall not taste of his supper. The impenitent shall perish; the unbeliever, whatever he may say to the contrary, shall be condemned; and those who obey not the gospel, by believing it, shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power.

If faith be not the sinner's duty, then the sinner who, by divine influence, is enabled to believe, does more than his duty. To affirm that faith is not a *duty*, but a *blessing* or *privilege*, will not meet the difficulty, or be satisfactory, unless it is proved that faith is not the sinner's own act; and this, I presume, will not be attempted. Either the sinner himself believes, or he does not believe. If he does not believe, he is still an unbeliever; but if he does himself personally so believe that faith is his own act, and yet faith, prior to its exercise, was not his duty, he does more than was required of him, and performs a work of supererogation, and thus we ap-

* See Ecking's Essays.

proximate to the church of Rome. Protestants will not readily yield to this, and the Bible utterly condemns it. Let those who exonerate sinners from the obligation to repent and believe the gospel, reconsider their system, that they may be prepared to vindicate or renounce it. It is clogged with absurdities, contradictions, and consequences that cannot, in my opinion, be satisfactorily met either on the principles of reason or revelation.

If faith be not a duty, it is right and proper to disbelieve, and consequently to make God a liar, as those are said to do who believe not the record that God has given of his Son. Now is this the duty of a sinner, rather than, by believing the divine testimony, to set to his seal that God is true? If to dispute the veracity of a fellow-creature be regarded as the highest possible offence, it can never, by any mode of argument, be proved that it is innocent to disbelieve Jehovah; and yet if faith is not a duty, unbelief must be harmless, and the immutable veracity of God may be called in question without offence.

Why were the Jewish nation nearly annihilated for their rejection of the Messiah, if it was not their duty to believe and embrace him? "He came to his own, but his own received him not;" that is, they did not believe on him.* They would not have him to reign over them. They would not come to him that they might have life. He was despised and rejected by them. Was it not on this ground that the wrath of God came upon them to the uttermost? They remain to this day an awful monument of God's holy displeasure and indignation against the

* John i. 11, 12.

sin of unbelief. "Well, because of unbelief they were broken off. If they abide not in unbelief they shall be grafted in again." If faith be not a duty, how can we clear the justice of God in his conduct towards the seed of Abraham for the last eighteen hundred years? If their unbelief was not criminal, wherefore came the wrath of God upon them to their destruction? If it be said that it was for killing the Lord Jesus, and the prophets, and for persecuting the apostles, and forbidding them to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, it is replied, that that conduct was the fruit of their unbelief, and proves at once that unbelief is the parent of crime, an offence to God, and ruinous to man.

If faith be not the duty of a sinner, then he must know himself a saint before he has any warrant to believe. Is not this to require a knowledge or an assurance of our interest in Christ before faith? The sinner, on this principle, knows his safety and his salvation before he believes in Christ. This absurdity must surely be sufficient to convince any unprejudiced mind, that the sentiment can have no foundation in the oracles of truth. Suppose a poor, guilty sinner, sensible of his danger, and feeling his sin a burden too intolerable for him to bear, makes the inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" Shall such an one be exhorted to believe? This would certainly be following scripture precedent. It was Paul's language to the Philippian jailor. But on the principle opposed, may not the trembling sinner reply—"Faith is not the duty of sinners, and, alas for me! I am a poor wretched creature, in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity. There is no good thing in me. My heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, and my crimes are

more in number than the hairs upon my head. In what light soever I view myself, I find nothing that can recommend me to God, or distinguish me from the vilest of men. I wish I could discern any of the marks or spots of God's children about me; I could then take some encouragement, and indulge some hope; but this is not my case. And as faith is not my duty as a sinner, and as I am nothing but a vile sinner, and have no right to come to Christ, I must, therefore, dreadful as it is, lie down in hopeless despair. The Lord has a right certainly to dispose of his favours according to his sovereign pleasure, and I know I am unworthy of the least of his mercies. I must, therefore, endeavour to be reconciled, if I can, to perish for ever." Such, according to this sentiment, might be the language of a convinced, self-condemned sinner. What reply can be made? The hyper-Calvinist may tell him he is a *saint*, and that he ought therefore to believe. But what evidence has he in his own mind that he is a saint? He says he has none; he neither feels nor discerns anything that, in his own view, would warrant the conclusion. He has sorrow of mind, and so had Cain and Judas, and, therefore, this sorrow is not to him a sufficient token. Evidences of a divine change cannot be discerned previous to faith in Christ. That man's vision must be clear indeed, who can discover the marks of regeneration before faith, and pronounce an unbeliever a child of God and an heir of heaven, while the scripture represents him in a state of condemnation. He that believeth not, let him be what he will, is said to be condemned already; he shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.

That such a character may, or may not, be under

that gracious influence which will bring him to Jesus, to holiness, and heaven, is a point that cannot be determined with safety, for no decisive evidence of his real state can be had without faith. If, therefore, he believes at all, he must believe as a sinner ready to perish. This is his duty and his happiness. The ministers of Christ should, therefore, exhort sinners to believe, as poor and guilty, without directing them to those marks and evidences of a change, by which they may be supposed to be distinguished from their fellow-men who are dead in sins. Let them be ever so vile, ever so destitute of every good thing, they should be encouraged and exhorted to believe in Jesus. Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. "Look upon him, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." He died for those who are without strength,—for the ungodly, for enemies, for the unjust, for sinners,—and he invites such to come to him, and he will give them rest. On this ground, the poor, guilty sinner, vile and undone as he is, has encouragement to believe; but on the other scheme, he may sink in despair, because, whatever he may really possess, he is utterly unable to discover anything in himself to distinguish him from the vilest reprobate, or that can be a ground on which he may venture to come to Christ. Nay, the convinced sinner, who is really under divine influence, cannot in that state persuade himself that he is in a *better state* than the vilest around him. How should he, when his eyes are opened only or chiefly upon his guilt and depravity? He can derive no comfort from himself. It is only by a discovery of Christ, as able and ready to save, that hope and comfort find a place in his bosom. If, in this state of mind, he should be informed, and should conclude that it was not the duty of sinners

indiscriminately to believe in Christ, he would probably reply in the following language—"I am a sinner, and a great one too, and therefore it would be presumption in me to believe. On the one hand, I am not under obligation to believe, and, therefore, may neglect it without sin; and, on the other hand, I am debarred from having faith as a privilege, because sinners, such as I am, have no *right* to believe. It may be the duty and happiness of *better* people than I am, such as have some distinguishing quality, to believe the gospel, but, alas for me! I am vile. O! that there were a gospel for the chief of sinners such as I am. If I had the marks of God's elect upon me, if I possessed some qualifications different from sinners in general, some godly sorrow of a right kind, and, in a due degree, some humility, some holiness, some certain evidence of a divine change, then I might indulge hope; but, alas! I can discern nothing in me but sin and wretchedness. Woe unto me, I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips." Such are the unhappy effects of the principle opposed. It encourages presumption in the self-righteous and the self-deceived antinomian pharisee; and tends to nourish despondency and despair in the truly convinced and converted sinner. But let sinners then of every description know assuredly, that they are warranted, by the precious invitations of the gospel, to believe in Christ, to receive him and all his benefits, without any consideration of moral fitness or any qualifications to render them more worthy than the most profligate. All the fitness required of a sinner in coming to Christ is, that he be needy, guilty, and lost. Even a consciousness of need, a good desire, a teachable disposition, a holy principle, &c., are not required as qualifications to warrant a sinner to embrace Christ,

though absolutely necessary to incline him to do so. "Who *may* believe," is one thing; "who *will* believe," is another. ALL *may* believe, on the warrant of the moral Governor; and SOME *will* believe, because enabled by sovereign grace. This view of the subject relieves the convinced, sensible sinner from his perplexity, and he is encouraged now, notwithstanding all his unworthiness, guilt, depravity, and depression, to cast himself upon the Saviour. "This man," says he, "receiveth sinners, and I, though a great sinner, am *but* a sinner, and, therefore, I will venture to approach him, and rely upon him as able and willing to save my guilty soul."

If faith be not a duty, then the ministers of the gospel should scrupulously avoid exhorting sinners to believe. They should not persuade men to flee from the wrath to come, nor beseech them to be reconciled to God, nor call upon them to repent and believe the gospel; nor should they suggest to them that unbelief is a dangerous thing, and that it will expose them to the displeasure of God, and to endless misery. But may it not be asked, "To what purpose is the gospel testimony, with its evidence, declared unto men, if they are not called to believe it? Or why should their guilt and danger be set before them if it be not meant that they should repent?"

"And they must be the more inexcusable in rejecting these calls, that there is scarcely an infidel to be found whose natural conscience will not, in some measure, correspond with the Word of God, both as to his guilt and danger."* If men are not called to believe, are not ministers bound to state, for the comfort of their unconverted hearers, that wherever

* Mc Lean on the Calls and Invitations of the Gospel.

the prophets, and Christ, and his apostles, have delivered anything that might be considered as warning sinners of their danger, and calling upon them to turn unto the Lord, they must either have mistaken the subject themselves, or else, that we misunderstand and misinterpret their language? Indeed, should not sinners be commended for not believing, if faith be not their incumbent duty? Might they not be plainly told that to believe the gospel, or to rest on Christ for salvation, would be meddling with what does not belong to them? Let sinners, therefore, be discouraged or forbidden to believe, that they may know what they ought not to do, as well as what they ought to perform. Let their minds be set at rest upon this important question.

It is painful to pursue this subject any farther, because it is so immediately opposed equally to reason and revelation. Obligation and guilt are of the same extent. Where duty ends criminality ceases, and of course all due punishment is at an end. Where there is no law to make faith a duty, there can be no penalty attached to unbelief. This creed sinks sinners below all obligation, and, connected with denying the binding obligation of the moral law upon believers, raises saints above all obligation; and thus, if it could be realized and supported by truth, would banish sin and guilt from our world, and misery, pain, and punishment from the world to come. How inconsistent, contradictory, and antiscriptural is such a system! What pernicious fruit may be expected from so poisonous a root! May the Lord grant its abettors repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth.

I am, &c.

LETTER THE NINTH.

Texts of scripture which prove faith to be the sinner's duty.

My dear Friend,

On the important inquiry whether faith be a duty, let the following passages of scripture be impartially examined. They are comparatively but few. To transcribe all that bear upon the subject would lay me under obligation to copy a very large portion of the Bible.

In selecting from the Old Testament, I might begin with Jehovah's language to Cain, Gen. iv. 6, 7: "And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee *shall be* his desire, and thou shalt rule over him." Does not this imply a requisition of faith and confidence? To deny it would represent God either as the patron of unbelief, or as directing Cain to means which could never end well. It was purely the want of faith that prevented the acceptance of himself and of his offering. So the apostle to the Hebrews has taught us to understand the subject: "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it he being dead yet speaketh."*

Does not Jehoshaphat exhort sinners to the exercise of faith? "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so

* Heb. xi. 4. See also the two following verses.

shall ye prosper."* The prophet Isaiah, probably referring to the above text, says, "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."† These passages require faith, or they can have no meaning. Any objection that can be raised against that explanation has been already anticipated.‡

"Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way."§ If this be not a strong and an undeniable exhortation to faith and love, I am utterly unable to understand the language. Embrace the Son of God, the Saviour of sinners. But how can that be without faith? "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people and thy father's house."‖ "Be still, and know that I am God."¶ "Now consider this, ye that forget God."** I might continue to add similar passages from almost every Psalm. Can the meaning and spirit of such texts be complied with without faith?

"O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker. To-day, if ye will hear his voice."†† The voice here intended is the voice of Christ; and to hear this voice is to believe what he declares. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews confirms both these particulars.‡‡ He introduces the facts to expose the evil, the guilt, and ruinous consequences of unbelief. As the Israelites were shut out of Canaan by their unbelief, so he warns us to beware of an evil heart, of unbelief, and of seeming to come short of the

* 2 Chron. xx. 20. † Isa. vii. 9. ‡ See Letter II.
§ Ps. ii. 12. ‖ Ps. xlv. 10.
¶ Ps. xlvi. 10. ** Ps. l. 22. †† Ps. xcv. 7, 8.
‡‡ Heb. iii. 7—18; iv. 1, 2.

heavenly Canaan. Is not faith required here? Can any man hear the voice of Christ, in the sense intended, and not believe? "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live."* It is at our peril to refuse him that speaketh from heaven. "For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from him who speaketh from heaven."†

If none are here exhorted to believe but those who do eventually believe, then this text would lose its point, and the comparison instituted by the inspired penman would have no force. But if more are exhorted to believe than do actually believe, then is faith the bounden duty of all. Sinners are not at liberty to refuse when he calls, to disregard when he stretches out his hand, or to disbelieve his word without incurring the displeasure of God.

"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else."‡ The people here intended are, no doubt, sinners, Gentile sinners. What other characters could inhabit the ends of the earth? To look unto Jesus is to believe on him. "For as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so shall the Son of Man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."§ Here looking and believing are synonymous. "This is the will of the Father, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life."‖ Thus the Baptist called upon the multitude,

* John v. 25; see also John x. 4, 5.
† Heb. xii. 25. ‡ Isa. xlv. 22. § John iii. 14, 15.
‖ John vi. 40.

saying, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Is not faith, even saving faith, as some term it, required by the following words—"Look unto me and be ye saved"? Looking unto Jesus is the same as believing on him.* Salvation is connected with the duty demanded. Look and be saved. The end of this faith is the salvation of the soul.

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."† If faith be not included in the matter of this exhortation, it will, I am confident, be difficult to find language that shall convey the idea. To hear, to come, to eat, are the very terms used in the New Testament to express faith in Christ.‡ Sinners, then, are here invited to the waters of life, to Christ who is the fountain of living water.§ If it should be said that the persons invited are convinced and sensible sinners, such as thirst for Christ and salvation, it is conceded that all such persons are invited. They are pressed by every possible argument and consideration to embrace the Saviour. But the question is whether these exclusively are

* Heb. xii. 2. † Isa. lv. 1, 3.
‡ John v. 25; Matt. xi. 28; John vi. 50, 58.
§ John iv. 10, 14.

invited, and exhorted to believe, or whether sinners indiscriminately are intended. In the second verse they are represented as "spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not." They are spending their best energies in the pursuit of the world, or the gratification of their unsanctified appetites. So I should understand the language. But let it be admitted that they were labouring in religion, and seeking satisfaction in costly and painful services. What advantage would this be to the cause of restricted exhortations? Is it not evident that all duties and exertions of a religious nature, springing from self-righteous principles, rather disqualify than otherwise? If any should, therefore, be excluded from the general call of the gospel, these self-righteous persons would be the very men, for publicans and harlots enter the kingdom of God before such.

But the persons intended here, and who are pressed to come to Christ, and receive the blessings of his kingdom, are described, in the seventh verse, as the *wicked* and the *unrighteous*; and they are nevertheless exhorted to "seek the Lord while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near; to forsake their wicked ways, and their unrighteous thoughts, and to turn to the Lord;" and they are encouraged to do so by an assurance of pardon. To seek the Lord, to call upon him, and to turn unto him, must surely include faith in him.* "For, how shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed? This portion of inspired truth is sufficient, in my opinion, com-

* Rom. x. 13, 14.

pletely to settle this question to every impartial and unprejudiced mind.

An appeal might now be made to the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel upon this point. If men are not called upon to believe the testimony of God, and to yield obedience to him, what construction can be put upon Jeremiah's mission,* and other parts of his book? Ezekiel is commanded to speak to, and call upon those who will not hearken, and to give them warning.† Nay, he is even commanded to prophesy upon the dry bones, and to say unto them, "O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!"‡

On this point God has pledged himself by oath that he hath "no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." Shall it be said after this that it is not the duty of sinners to believe? Shall God command, invite, and entreat sinners, and even *swear* that he has no pleasure in their death, and, after all, shall it be affirmed that he does not require them to believe? "All the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have called upon sinners to hear and believe the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophet and messenger of God, and declared, that every soul that will not hear that Prophet shall be destroyed."§ The whole Bible establishes the sentiment, for divine truth is ever consistent with itself.

I remain, &c.

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* Jer. i. 5—9; xv. 19—21; xvii. 21, 27.

† Ezekiel, 2nd and 3rd chapters throughout. See also 18th chapter throughout, particularly from v. 27 to the end.

‡ Ezek. xxxvii. 1—7. § Acts iii. 22—24

LETTER THE TENTH.

Texts of Scripture from the New Testament which prove faith to be the sinner's duty.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Let us now glance at a few texts, on this subject, in the New Testament. Did not John the Baptist begin his ministry with a call to repentance and faith?* Jesus opened his mission to men with the requisition of faith and repentance: "Repent ye and believe the gospel."† When the carnal wicked Jews inquired, "What shall we do that we may work the works of God?" the Saviour replied, "This is the work of God," the work he commands and approves, "that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."‡ This reply was, no doubt, adapted to the occasion, and the Jews understood him as requiring faith in himself, saying, "What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and *believe thee?* what dost thou work?"§ Does not the Redeemer very frequently challenge their faith, and charge them with unbelief? "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." "Because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. If I say the truth," which none of you can deny, "why do ye not believe me?"‖ No discourse of the Saviour can be referred to, of any length, in which faith is not required. I might instance his sermon on the mount, and the parables recorded in the thirteenth of Matthew; but I content myself with referring to the

* Matt. iii., Mark i., Luke iii., John i., compared with Acts xiii. 24, 25, xix. 1—5.

† Mark i. 15. ‡ John vi. 28, 29. § John vi. 30.

‖ John viii. 24, 45, 46.

invitations given to attend the gospel feast.* Behold the sumptuous provisions, and the repeated invitations given, and how both were slighted. "They made light of it." Did not this represent the provision made for the salvation of the guilty and unworthy by the life and death of Christ? Was not the invitation designed to represent the call of the gospel to sinful men? and the treatment of that invitation an emblem of the rejection of Christ, by those who will not have him to reign over them? Here, then, it is plain some are bidden who do not come. "The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy," and, by their contempt of the feast, they provoked the Lord's anger. This sufficiently shews that the invitation was not confined to the elect, but extended to all, "both bad and good," and that those who refused to come shall, for their rejection, be punished by the Master of the feast. Can any man carefully examine these parables, and maintain that faith is not a duty, and that unbelief is not a sin? Similar remarks might be made on the account of the supper given in Luke. The people are bidden; they refuse to come, and the Lord is offended with them, and declares they shall not taste of his supper. The invitation, however, is enlarged; and the poor and the maimed, and the halt and the blind, are desired to come. The servants are commanded to go everywhere, and compel men to come in. If there is any spiritual meaning to be derived from such a portion of holy scripture, it must undoubtedly convey to us the abundant provision and unlimited proclamation of the gospel,—the binding obligation of sinners

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* Matt. xxii. 1—14.

indiscriminately to believe and receive the invitation,—and the displeasure of God incurred by unbelief and by a rejection of the Saviour. Is not coming to the feast, and believing on Jesus Christ, one and the same thing? Can there be any coming and feasting without faith? Was it not the duty and interest of all to come who were invited? Some were invited who, however, did not come. This is a fact not to be refuted, that unconverted sinners were invited, yea, even the non-elect, who should never taste of his supper. As the apostles then, so the ministers of the gospel now, are commissioned to invite all they can find, good or bad, without distinction. The woes denounced by the Saviour upon the scribes and the pharisees are so many arguments to prove their obligation to believe, and their guilt in not believing. What is the import of the commission which the risen Saviour gave to his disciples? "Go ye into all the world," said he, "and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."* To preach the gospel is to propose and set forth Christ for the acceptance of unworthy and perishing sinners. "A SAVIOUR! A SAVIOUR! is the loud proclamation of the gospel."† Christ is set before them as a ground of hope, lifted up, as the serpent upon the pole, that men may look and live. The gospel invites all to come to the feast, for the invitation is a sufficient warrant for all to come, and is the ground on which any do come to Christ.

The Saviour's commission is so plain that it needs

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* Mark xvi. 15, 16.

† Beart's Eternal Law and Everlasting Gospel, Part ii. p. 52.

no comment. "He may run that readeth it." Faith is connected with salvation, and unbelief is threatened with damnation. This is to be published to every creature, and therefore the duty and the danger are universal.

The apostles went and preached everywhere that men should repent, and turn to God. "Repentance towards God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ," were the two grand topics on which they constantly insisted. Paul preached to the unbelieving Jews the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, and bade them beware lest, by the rejection of the gospel message, they should bring upon themselves the awful curse denounced by the prophets against those who despise and reject the only Saviour. Yet to these very men the word of salvation was sent; and Paul continued to preach Christ unto them until they put the word of life from them, and opposed him by contradicting and blaspheming. The apostle then assured these unbelieving Jews, "It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you; but," says he, "seeing ye put it from you, and judge," discover and prove, "yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles."* Let any man with an unbiassed mind read this chapter, and he must necessarily conclude that faith is the duty of all who have the gospel. Conformably to this we find Peter exhorting one, confessedly in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity, to repentance and prayer.† Could these be performed without faith? if not, then Peter exhorted a wicked sinner to the exercise of faith.

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* See Acts xiii. 38—46. † Acts viii. 18—24.

But Peter did not exhort to anything but what was matter of duty. And it is hoped none will charge Peter with unsoundness in the faith, or want of evangelical principles.

The apostle John had enjoyed a peculiar intimacy with his Lord, and was well acquainted with the divine will; and on this subject he says expressly, "This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment."* This needs not a word of explanation. Here faith appears as one of the weightier matters of the law, which cannot be neglected without great guilt.

Does not the Redeemer invite us to come to him and drink, with an assurance that him that cometh shall in no wise be cast out? "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."† "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."‡ The whole Bible confirms the idea of faith being the imperative duty of all who are favoured with divine revelation. All the threatenings contained in the Old and New Testament imply the sentiment for which I contend. The crimes that are charged upon the Jews are all traced up to their unbelief, as the spring from which they proceeded. The threatenings denounced against sinners, on account of their unbelief, lose all their force if it is not the sinner's duty to believe.

"To believe the gospel," says Mr. Ecking, "is the

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* 1 John iii. 23.

† Rev. xxii. 17. ‡ Matt. xi. 28.

commandment of the everlasting God, (1 John iii. 23; Rom. xvi. 25, 26; John xii. 50; Mark xv.) And if the command, exhortation, and invitation of God do not bind the conscience and enforce obedience, what does?

"Since, therefore, it is nothing but man's DISINCLINATION that prevents his believing,—since unbelief is a sin deserving damnation,—and since it is the commandment of the everlasting God that men should repent and believe the gospel, it follows, of course, that to believe the gospel must be the duty of every person who hears it."*

Finally, Moses and the prophets, Christ and his apostles, concur in requiring faith of all who hear them, and to denounce the heaviest doom upon all who disbelieve their message. "That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

I remain, &c.

LETTER THE ELEVENTH.

Examination of the Definitions of Faith, by Messrs. Marshall, Hervey, Cudworth, &c.†

MY DEAR FRIEND,

The justly celebrated author of "Theron and Aspasio" contended that appropriation, or a firm persuasion of personal interest in Christ, was essential to faith. He says (vol. iii. p. 278), "Faith is a real persuasion that the blessed Jesus has shed his blood for *me*, and fulfilled all righteousness in *my*

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* Essays on Grace, Faith, and Experience.

† See Letter the third.

stead; that, through his great atonement and obedience, he has purchased, even for *my* sinful soul, reconciliation with God, sanctifying grace, and all spiritual blessings." This language does not accord with Mr. Hervey's own published opinion concerning the *merits of* CHRIST.—See my Essay on the Atonement.

On this definition of faith the late Mr. Pearsall, of Taunton, very delicately, but firmly and powerfully, animadverted, in a respectful letter to Mr. Hervey, dated May 25th, 1755.* It may be doubted whether this letter and other papers written against his opinion had any influence in changing Mr. Hervey's views. He continued after this period to recommend Marshall's "Gospel Mystery of Sanctification" in almost unmeasured terms. In a letter to Mr. Ryland, dated April 15th, 1758, he says, "I really am more and more confirmed in my opinion, notwithstanding all the objections; or rather I am more and more convinced that Mr. Marshall's doctrine is the doctrine of the Gospel. To this my reason subscribes; this I think is taught in the Scriptures; this I am sure is approved and ratified by my own daily experience. When I depart from this precious truth—'Assurance, by the direct act of faith'—I fall into darkness and distress," &c., &c. In his "Theron and Aspasio," after commending Mr. Marshall's Treatise on Sanctification, in very strong terms, he concludes by saying, "Was I to be banished into some desolate island, possessed only of two books besides my Bible, this should be one of the two; perhaps the first that I would choose."

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* See the *Theological Magazine* for 1801, p. 104.

Mr. Pike, of London, (I imagine, the author of "Cases of Conscience,") also wrote Mr. Hervey a long letter "on the subject of assurance of faith." "Mr. Brine," says Mr. Hervey, "is against me on this subject." Mr. Brine said, "If by an appropriation of Christ, is meant an application to him for life and salvation, this is essential to faith. But if it designs a conclusion springing up in my mind of my own interest in him and in his saving benefits, I cannot but apprehend it is a mistake. A poor sinner may discern his need of Christ, and be fully persuaded of his ability to save him, and, upon it, apply unto him for mercy, pardon, and succour in his distressed condition, in this language—*If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean;* which I hope will be found to be that faith which is the faith of the operation of God."*

It cannot be matter of great surprise that the current of opinion ran strongly against the elegant author of "Theron and Aspasio" on this important subject. Sandeman's letters were considered a powerful attack, on which Mr. Cudworth took up his pen to defend Mr. Hervey. Both these acute and masterly reasoners put forth their whole energy in a subsequent correspondence. I conceive, however, that the ground taken by Marshall, Hervey, and Cudworth, is untenable. From the tenth direction in the "Gospel Mystery of Sanctification," I make the following quotation:—

"In the last place, let it be well observed that the reason why we are to assure ourselves in our faith, that God freely giveth Christ and salvation to us particularly, is not because it is a truth before we

* See Hervey's Letters to the Rev. John Ryland, of Northampton. Letter 17th.

believe it, but because it becometh a certain truth when we believe it, and because it will never be true except we do in some measure believe, persuade, and assure ourselves that it is so. We have no absolute promise or declaration in scripture that God certainly will do or doth give Christ and his salvation to any one of us in particular; neither do we know it to be true already by scripture, or sense, or reason, before we assure ourselves absolutely of it; yea, we are without Christ's salvation at present, in a state of sin and misery, under the curse and wrath of God. Only I shall prove that we are bound by the command of God thus to assure ourselves, and the scripture doth sufficiently warrant us that we should not deceive ourselves in believing a lie, but according to our faith, so shall it be to us, (Matt. ix. 29.) This is a strange kind of assurance, far different from other ordinary kinds, and, therefore, no wonder if it be found weak and imperfect, and difficult to be obtained, and assaulted with many doubtings. We are constrained to believe other things on the clear evidence we have that they are true, and would remain true whether we believe them or no; so that we cannot deny our assent, without rebelling against the light of our senses, reason, or conscience. But here our assurance is not impressed on our thoughts by any evidence of the thing, but we must work it out in ourselves by the assistance of the Spirit of God, and thereby we bring our own thoughts into captivity to the obedience of Christ. None but God can justly require of us this kind of assurance, because he only calleth those things that are not as though they were, (Rom. iv. 17.) He only can give existence to things that yet are not,

and make a thing to be true upon our believing it that was not true before."

This I consider to be strange doctrine, and totally unsupported by the word of God. It requires us to believe without evidence, and to assure ourselves that that which is not *a truth before we believe it, and which never will be true except we do persuade and assure ourselves that it is so,—that though it was not true before, it becomes a certain truth when we believe it;* and that this idea of faith will not hold good on any other subject; for we are, in all other matters, to believe only *on having clear evidence that what we believe is true, and would remain true whether we believed it or not.* This is a *mystery* indeed. To believe without evidence is not *faith,* but *fancy;* delusion or presumption. To talk of making that to be true, by believing it, which is not antecedently true, and never would be true if we did not believe it, would be considered an affront to common sense in the affairs of ordinary life; or in any thing but in religious matters; in which, for the support of some peculiar hypothesis, nothing is too absurd or ridiculous to be propagated or received. Shall the God of unchanging veracity set falsehoods or nonentities before his creatures, to be transformed into truths and realities by a self-persuasion and confident belief of them? or can he command men to believe that which is not true antecedent to their belief of it, and which would never be true if they did not believe it? Surely the divine word will remain eternally true whether men believe it or not! Let God be true though every man be a liar. The faith connected with salvation is a *belief* of the TRUTH.

On all the points brought before you in these letters you will of course judge for yourself. Freedom of inquiry is a jewel of great worth. May you and I prize and use it as we ought, proving all things, and holding fast that only which is good. Consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding in all things, and especially in the things which belong to our present and eternal peace.

Believe me to be, my dear Friend, your's sincerely to serve in the gospel of our common Lord, &c.

MAN'S ABILITY TO DO THE WILL OF GOD,

THE GROUND AND MEASURE

OF

HIS CRIMINALITY AND PUNISHMENT:

IN

Letters to a Friend.

LETTER THE FIRST.

The question stated, and some general remarks upon it.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Free correspondence on religious subjects generally yields me a double advantage. In the first place, it impels my mind to exertion, calling into exercise the thinking powers which might otherwise have remained inactive or have been employed upon subjects of no moment, or even upon those which might be injurious to the soul; and, in the second place, it is often, if not always, rewarded by farther discoveries of divine truth, its importance, and harmony. My previous views are sometimes corrected, and at others, they are confirmed, and my love to truth inflamed; so that I become rooted and established in the faith. These benefits more than repay me for the time and pains employed in such correspondence. I have experienced much pleasure and edification from your pen, but now you lay

mine under contribution. As you are desirous of spiritual profit rather than simple information, the subject should not be one of mere speculation, in which the head is more concerned than the heart, but something that enters deeply into doctrinal, experimental, and practical godliness, and which has an important influence on our eternal destiny. There is a subject which appears to me to be of this kind, but which, though of vital importance to the cause of truth, I think has not had a sufficient share of serious attention. I refer to the extent of man's ability to do the will of God, and what will be the ground of man's criminality before his Judge, and the measure of his future punishment. To this important point I would respectfully invite your attention; and I hope, nay, I entreat, that you will freely remark upon what I may state, and object and oppose as you may see occasion.

It is possible I may not succeed in conveying to your mind the precise ideas I have in my own. But to prevent, as far as possible, being misunderstood, I will propose the inquiry in different forms. I ask, then,

Is human ABILITY the measure of human GUILT? Or,

Does man's *present duty* EXCEED his *present strength?* Or thus,

Is man *criminal* for omitting that which he had *no power* to do, or which it was *impossible* for him to perform? Or, in yet other words,

Does God require *impossibilities* from his creatures, and then *punish* them for *non-performance?*

In addition to these various inquiries, I will offer a few remarks which may serve further to explain the subject proposed for discussion.

That sinners are represented as criminal in rejecting the salvation published by the gospel, I suppose very few will deny. There are in the Bible many very pointed, pressing exhortations, and gracious invitations, addressed directly to the wicked, the unrighteous, the stout-hearted, &c., (Isa. lv. 1—7; xlvi. 12; Ez. xxxiii. 11.) For a disregard to these warnings and advice, sinners are threatened with aggravated punishment and misery in a future world, (Matt. xi. 20—25; xii. 40—42.) Their guilt and condemnation are represented as proportioned to the greatness of neglected and despised privileges.

But if man be *without* strength (Rom. v. 6; John xv. 5), and have *no* ability (2 Cor. iii. 5), how *can* he comply with his prescribed duty, or do *otherwise* than sin against God? (Rom. viii. 7, 8.)

Here let me ask, whether it can be consistent with the views we entertain of the unimpeachable equity of God, and with the representation the holy Scriptures give us of the righteous Judge, for him to inflict eternal punishment upon his creatures for the omission of what they had never *any power* to perform, and for doing that which they *could not possibly* avoid? Can this difficulty be satisfactorily removed? Many persons, both of the Calvinistic and of the Arminian persuasion, represent their hearers and sinners generally to be as dead as stones, or as the bodies of men consigned in the grave-yard to their mother earth; and yet, in the same discourse, exhort very warmly, and with apparent earnestness, their dead hearers to flee from the wrath to come, to repent of sin, to believe the gospel, and to lay hold of eternal life. It may be remarked, that by *straining* figurative texts and

phrases we are liable greatly to err. "To squeeze metaphors by running the parallel further than truth and decency with respect to the emblem and object will admit, is not to illustrate, but to discredit and darken the mysteries of God." By pursuing the figure of death through all its ramifications, and applying it to a sinner, we might exonerate him from all commands, and free him from all blame and punishment in this world, and in that which is to come. For who would command, or blame, or punish a dead man? In such cases, your correspondent has felt greatly perplexed when he has attempted to reconcile what appeared to him so very inconsistent, not to say irreconcileable. When retiring into secret, he has been constrained to ask himself, "How can these things be? How can a person *without strength*, without life, comply with the exhortation?" He has, when proper opportunities have offered, inquired of the parties themselves how they united and reconciled such jarring or apparently opposite sentiments.

In meeting the above inquiry, the Arminian has replied, that he felt no difficulty upon the subject, believing, as he did, that though man by nature was dead as a stone, yet that the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, had appeared to all men; that Christ "was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world;" and that "a measure of the Spirit is given to every one to profit withal;" and on this ground he could, as a worker together with God, exhort sinners, most consistently, not to receive the grace of God in vain, but to work out their salvation with fear and trembling.

The Calvinist has met the inquiry in a different way. He has attempted to extricate himself, and

to vindicate his creed and conduct from the charge of inconsistency, by appealing to man's purity and ability in Adam when he was created, and to the high sovereignty and rights of God; alleging, that man's want of power, seeing he lost it himself, cannot oblige the Divine Lawgiver to bring down his demands to man's present ability. God has still a right to demand as much as ever, though man be wholly unable to yield any, even the least, obedience to his will.

Are these solutions consistent with the Scriptures of truth, and calculated to remove the difficulty? Your correspondent was never perfectly satisfied with either of them. He cannot approve the idea of the Arminians, that the Lord is under obligation to impart grace or strength to his guilty, rebellious creatures, in order that he may be *just* in their condemnation. If Jehovah cannot, in strict righteousness and equity, proceed against sinners of mankind unless he first communicate to them supernatural ability or grace, such a communication becomes a debt to them, and, consequently, cannot be considered as grace at all. This plan therefore, however plausible it may appear to a superficial observer, is attended with many difficulties, and is evidently repugnant to both reason and revelation. It represents the Divine Being as having given a law, to which his creatures, as such, cannot yield the required obedience without supernatural assistance, and that they have no right to demand that assistance, because it is the free grace of God; and yet, that God cannot justly condemn them, unless he previously give them that which he is under no obligation to bestow. It exhibits the same thing, on the one hand, as free and undeserved favour, and a

ground of eternal gratitude to God; and, on the other, as a matter of strict and impartial justice, which every sinner of mankind has a right to claim at the hand of his Judge; and that God cannot be just in the condemnation of the sinner, except he first give him what he is under no obligation to confer.

The opinion of the Calvinist, though it may seem to some persons unanswerable, has doubtless many difficulties attending it. God's right to command cannot be disputed, nor can we assert that Jehovah has any way altered, softened, or changed his law. Like its divine Author, the law is without variableness or any shadow of turning. But, granting this, the disciples of Geneva surely will not affirm, that God will condemn men, or that he has a *right* to do so, eternally, for not performing impossibilities; that is, for not yielding obedience beyond their ability. He commands men to love him with all their heart, to repent and believe in his Son Jesus Christ; but, if they really can do none of these things, then he commands what is impossible; and then, allow me to ask, will he sentence the disobedient, I mean those who could not be otherwise than disobedient, to everlasting punishment on that ground? and shall sinful mortals presume to vindicate the justice of the Divine proceeding, by saying, "God has not lost his right to command, though man has lost his power to obey"? With very high ideas of the sovereignty of God, and with the highest regards for it, I cannot be persuaded to suppose that, in its exercise, God ever steps over the line of equity, or condemns men by mere prerogative; or, that the Most High will ever thank any man for vindicating the glory of his sovereignty at the expense of the glory of his justice.

But all Calvinists do not take exactly the same ground in attempting to remove this difficulty. Some of them, who run pretty high in the predestinarian scheme, endeavour to remove all difficulties which attach to this question, by representing man as in a *state* of condemnation in consequence of the original sin of Adam, and (tacitly) through an eternal decree, and that man is not, therefore, the proper object of exhortation, any more than the unhappy inhabitants of the region of despair, until God has marked him by his grace as the object of his eternal love. They contend, therefore, that sinners promiscuously are not to be invited to the gospel feast, nor urged to come to Christ, or to believe in him for pardon, righteousness, and salvation. A previous conviction of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, a sense of danger,—in short, a renovation of nature by divine influence, they consider necessary to warrant them to exhort sinners to embrace the Saviour. Thus, it is not the *duty* of any sinner to believe till he is saved, nor to come to Christ for pardon till he be pardoned, nor to seek the *favour* of God till he know he has received that *favour*. This would lead to assurance of interest in electing love and redeeming grace, before faith in Christ; yea, before the sinner had a *right* to believe, or any one had authority to exhort him to believe, in Jesus. The curses of the law may be denounced, but no invitations to come to Christ, or to repent, and believe the gospel to the saving of the soul. Such persons are reluctant to bring any charge against men for their actual transgressions, or to represent unbelief as a crime. They explain it rather as descriptive of the character who shall perish, than as the meritorious cause of condemnation itself. Neglecting the

great salvation, making light of the invitations of the gospel, refusing to hear when God calls, rejecting the counsel of God against themselves, and receiving the grace of God in vain, are things of which no man can possibly be guilty upon their system.

"The rejecting of life," says an author of no mean reputation, "upon the gracious terms of the gospel, makes the condemnation of men most just, certain, and heavy. If they are wilful to be damned, it is most equal they should inherit their own choice. Wilful neglect of redeeming mercy aggravates the sentence, and brings an extraordinary damnation upon sinners. Infidelity is an outrage, not to man, or an angel, but to the eternal Son. How much more tolerable had been the condition of such sinners if saving grace had never appeared unto men, or they had never heard of it. For the degrees of wrath shall be in proportion to the riches of neglected goodness. Those that lived and died in the darkness of heathenism shall have a cooler climate in hell than those who neglect the great salvation."*

Such was the doctrine preached and published by men of whom the world was not worthy. But, on the plan of some predestinarians in the present day, such language cannot be employed or tolerated. They would deem it altogether anti-evangelical. The plan of the hyper-Calvinist, when maturely considered, must appear more flatly contrary to the plan of doctrine revealed in the Bible than either of the others.

* Bates's Harmony of the Divine Attributes, pp. 204—206. London: 1675.

It must be admitted that God might justly have executed his threatening in its fullest extent against our first parent Adam, and all his posterity, at once; but it is undeniably evident that he has acted a different part. Man is spared—the world is peopled with sinners—mercy is proclaimed—God so loved the world, that he not only spared man, but that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Jesus came into the world to save sinners; and (to me) it appears that sinners are called upon to repent and believe the gospel, to look to him and be saved. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." Now, as faith and unbelief are here made the hinges on which our salvation or condemnation turns, your correspondent proposes to pursue the inquiry, "Whether man's present strength be equal to his present duty? or, whether he must finally perish for the want of that faith which it was never in his power to possess?"

I am, &c.

LETTER THE SECOND.

Explanatory Remarks upon the question.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

In examining the EXTENT of man's *ability* to do the will of God, we have great need to proceed with candour and care. Some apparent difficulty may be apprehended in an attempt to reconcile the claims of God with the powers of man, and the commands of the law with man's supposed inability

to obey; but the methods taken to remove the difficulty, as stated in my former Letter, are, in my apprehension, very unsatisfactory.

It appears to me, that God certainly requires something of a sinner, as matter of duty; otherwise, he is under no obligation to obey, and, consequently, cannot sin; for where there is no duty, there can be no criminality for neglect: where there is no law, there can be no transgression. Now, whatever that obligation is, the sinner must be condemned for non-compliance, and, therefore, condemned for not performing what it was impossible for him to perform, if his strength be not equal to divine requirements. This would be a serious charge to bring against the proceedings of the Almighty.

"Does man's *present duty exceed his present strength?*"

Let us pay some little attention to the terms in which the inquiry is expressed. *Strength* is intended to signify the same idea as *power*, or *ability*, in strictness of language. *Present* strength seems to convey the idea, that man's strength may have been *different* at some *past* period, and that it may be *different* again at some *future* period to what it is *now*. Hence it refers to man as fallen from his primitive state of rectitude and holiness, and limits the question to his strength in his present state of awful apostasy from God.

His *present duty* is therefore that, whatever it be, which his Creator requires him to perform in his present *fallen* and guilty circumstances. The inquiry, therefore, returns upon us: "Can man, in his present depraved state, perform the duty or the duties which the Almighty, upon the pain of his eternal displeasure, requires him to perform?"

First, I shall endeavour to ascertain the extent of man's duty.

The duty of man varies with his circumstances. The obligations of Adam in paradise, of the heathen without divine revelation, and of Britons favoured with a preached gospel, may surely be considered as very different. The very same duties are not required of the rich and poor; the learned and illiterate; of parents and children; masters and servants; of the healthy and the sick; of those that enjoy a preached gospel, and of those who never had the opportunity of hearing the name of Jesus.

To represent the law as consisting of a specific number of precepts or commands, whether two, or ten, or a hundred, requiring the same precise kind and quantity of obedience in every particular from all men, irrespective of their circumstances, would be very different from the obligations imposed by the Bible, and would confound the duties of the rich and the poor, the master and his servant, and the king and his subjects. The moral law is a general principle, requiring love, in all its diversified exercises and effects, towards proper objects,—love to the Supreme Being, and to all his creatures for his sake. Hence the law is adapted, without enlargement or abridgment, to all the possible cases and circumstances of God's rational and accountable creation, from the highest angel in heaven to the lowest spirit in hell.

But it is our present object to ascertain what is the common, general duty of those persons universally, who, as the fallen children of Adam, are favoured with divine Revelation; or, in other words, with the Bible.

Certainly, it will be admitted by all who profess the religion of Jesus, that men should love God, and yield obedience to his commands—that it is their duty to serve their Maker sincerely and constantly, according to the requirements of his holy word—that they should supplicate him for his blessings—be thankful for his mercies — confess their sins—repent and forsake them—cease to do evil, and learn to do well—be humble and patient, and, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present world. In other words, they should flee from the wrath to come, seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near—forsake their wicked ways, and unrighteous thoughts, and turn unto the Lord with their whole heart, renouncing their own righteousness, and submitting to the righteousness of God; and embracing the Lord Jesus Christ as the only refuge for guilty sinners. I might fill many sheets in pointing out what the Lord God requires of sinners; commanding them, as he does, to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with him. But as no duty can be performed acceptably to God, without faith, I may fix upon believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, as containing, radically and essentially, the whole of a sinner's duty. I might mention love to God and man, and true repentance, as required of him; but these are virtually included in believing the record God has given of his Son. That faith is the duty of all persons who are favoured with the gospel, might be proved by a variety of considerations. It is virtually required by the divine law; and it is directly enjoined by many plain and unequivocal texts of scripture.

Some persons admit the sinner's obligation to re-

pent and believe the gospel, and yet say that though he has no power whatever to comply he must address God on a throne of grace to give him power. But how can he pray acceptably without faith? He that cometh to God must believe. Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Only the prayer of faith will succeed. Let not the unbeliever think that he shall receive anything of the Lord, (James i. 5, 7; Heb. xi. 5, 6.) Faith must take the lead. What could we promise ourselves from him whose word we do not believe? So that to direct the impotent sinner to perform a duty, in order to obtain faith, or a power to believe, which itself cannot be performed, acceptably to God, but in the exercise of faith, is (to say the very least) materially increasing the difficulty it is intended to remove.

The want of faith is represented as the ostensible ground of a sinner's condemnation; and its exercise being absolutely necessary to the performance of any work acceptable to God, if it be not the sinner's duty to believe, he is virtually released from all obligation whatever, and consequently cannot sin nor be justly punished for sin. Certainly that must be a matter of duty which is required of man upon pain of eternal condemnation. And is not this precisely the case with respect to faith? "He that believeth not shall be damned. If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins. He that believeth not is condemned already, *because* he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God *abideth* on him." Here, as it has been remarked before, faith and un-

belief are made the hinges on which our salvation or condemnation turns. I conclude, then, that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the sinner's present duty, and have thus brought his duty to one single point.

Much has been said and written upon the subject of FAITH. It has been classed under the heads of historical faith, temporary faith, the faith of miracles, and what some, perhaps in a way of scorn, are pleased to call *duty faith*. Some persons talk of the natural duties of religion, and of a natural faith to believe the external report of the gospel. The subject of faith has also been deplorably mystified, or, rather, the minds of men have been bewildered by its being distinguished into the faith of reliance, the faith of affiance, the faith of application, and the faith of appropriation. And the various exercises of faith have been distinguished into the direct, the reflex, the recumbent, the courageous, and the triumphant acts of faith. But what have all these things to do with the simple account given us of faith in the gospel of Christ? In my apprehension, nothing at all. I shall, therefore, wave all these distinctions, and leave them to those who have a taste for them. The faith which I maintain to be the duty of every person blessed with reason and revelation, is a belief of the truth; and whosoever possesses that faith shall assuredly be saved.—Mark xvi. 16; Acts xvi. 30, 31; John iii. 18—36.

True and saving faith is a belief of the gospel that Christ commanded his apostles to preach to every creature, which is the same as the record or testimony of God concerning his Son, and is emphatically termed *the truth*, as it is to the belief of

this truth the promise of salvation is made, as well as every saving and sanctifying effect on the heart and life ascribed. This faith is a persuasion of the truth and reality of what God has revealed in his word. The understanding perceives the truth, and the heart gives credit to it. The purity and beauty of the divine law, and the grace and glory of the gospel, as they appear in the person and work of Christ, are discerned, and the heart believes unto righteousness, and the mouth makes confession unto salvation. Though faith supposes the illumination of the understanding, and is inseparably connected with love, yet it is not to be identified or confounded with either, but distinguished from both. It is credit given to the divine word. It is a full persuasion that God is what he has represented himself to be,—that what he has said is immutable and eternal truth, and may be relied upon with unhesitating confidence.

That I may preclude as many objections and inquiries as possible, I will just add that I do not mean to say or maintain, that this faith implies it to be the duty of everyone who hears the gospel to believe that he is elected; that Christ shed his blood for him in particular; or, that he shall certainly go to heaven; because these things are not true of all that hear the gospel. So that if it were their duty to believe them, it would be their duty to believe a lie.

Many contend that faith is an appropriation of Christ, or a " persuasion that Christ and his salvation are mine; that he loved me and gave himself for me." This opinion respecting faith cannot be supported by the oracles of truth. All men are required to believe God speaking in the holy Scrip-

tures; but those Scriptures nowhere declare, or require a belief, that all men have an interest in Christ and his salvation. Nor do they warrant any man, while ungodly and impenitent, to believe that he has an interest in Christ; but the very reverse—that he is under the curse of a broken law, condemned already, and exposed to the holy displeasure of the Almighty. God does not command men to believe anything without evidence; but the unconverted sinner has no evidence of his interest in Christ, nor can he, in the nature of things, have such evidence, and therefore no such faith is required or can be exercised. It is not true respecting all who hear the gospel that Christ is their's, and their believing it cannot make it true. Nor can it be known to be true respecting any, but by their believing, and coming to Christ as guilty and self-ruined sinners, and embracing him as an almighty Saviour, adapted to their lost and needy condition; or, in other words, accepting that faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

To confound faith with appropriation, establishes presumption upon principle, and draws in conscience itself to support self-deception. This principle leads men to neglect the truth, to represent the rising doubts which the children of God sometimes experience as legal,—to persuade themselves, without any scriptural evidence, of the goodness and safety of their state;—and to neglect the means Infinite Wisdom has appointed to make their calling and election sure. There is scarcely any sentiment embraced by professors of religion so contrary to the Bible and to Christian experience, and so pernicious in its influence, as the opinion that appropria-

tion is of the essence of faith. Appropriation is the offspring of faith, and enjoyed as the result of believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is, however, the duty of every hearer of the gospel to believe the record God has given of his Son. That *record* is plain. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life;—that he is WELL PLEASED IN HIM;—that Jesus is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth;—that there is redemption in his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace, for the guilty and the vile;—that this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,—that he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them,—and that God gives eternal life to as many as believe in his name.

It is, I presume, clearly evident that faith, upon the peril of eternal death, is required of all who are favoured with divine revelation.* Whether man *can* comply with his duty shall be the subject of my next. In the meantime,

I remain, &c.

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* See Letters on the Extent of Man's Duty.

LETTER THE THIRD.

The extent of man's present ability.

My dear Friend,

I shall now endeavour, in the second place, to ascertain the EXTENT of man's present strength, and whether it be equal to his duty. If it is not, why exhort him? if it is, why does he not perform it? If he *cannot* believe, though desirous to do so, his unbelief is invincible, and consequently not criminal; but if he *can* believe, and yet *will not*, his condemnation is just. The point, then, turns upon what man *can* or *cannot* do. Some persons scruple not to affirm that man *can* no more believe than he *can* make a world, or than the dead can arise out of their graves, and perform the duties of life. As the words *can*, and *cannot*, indicate strength and ability, or the want of them, it is necessary, in this place, minutely to examine them with reference to the point in hand.

The word *cannot* is sometimes employed to signify that which is, strictly speaking, *impossible*. "God doeth great things, which I *cannot* comprehend. I *cannot* thunder with a voice like God. I *cannot* bring forth Mazzaroth in his season, nor *can* I guide Arcturus with his sons. I *cannot* number the clouds in wisdom, nor *can* I stay the bottles of heaven."—(Job xxxvii. xxxviii.) Man *cannot* overthrow the work of God.—(Acts v. 39.) I *cannot* make water into wine. I *cannot* create a world, nor even a fly. I *cannot* make one hair of my head white or black. I *cannot* by taking thought add one cubit to my stature. The mariners *could not*

bring the ship to land, for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.—(Jonah i. 13.) Thus we affirm of the blind, that they *cannot* see; of the deaf, that they *cannot* hear; of the dumb, that they *cannot* speak; and of the dead, that they CANNOT perform the functions of life. Numberless instances might be introduced of the use of the word *cannot,* to signify that which is naturally and strictly *impossible.* Now, the questions before us are simply these:—Are sinners, in this sense, unable to believe in Christ? Is it strictly impossible for them to do so? And are they as innocent in not believing in Christ, as the dead are in not rising from their graves; as a man is, who does not create a world; or as the mariners were in not bringing the ship to land? We do not censure a man who was born blind, or deaf, or dumb, for remaining so. It is his infelicity, and not his sin; and calls for our compassion, and not reproof. If the sinner's unbelief could be ascribed to the same kind of weakness or want of power as that which renders it naturally and absolutely impossible for the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak, then his not believing would be his calamity rather than his crime.

But further—

The word *cannot* is often used to express, not a want of power, or strength, or ability, but *a want of will* or *inclination.* "The slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and *cannot* bring it to his mouth again." Some persons have eyes full of adultery, and *cannot* cease from sin. The drunkard *cannot* refrain from his cups. Joseph's brethren *could not* speak peaceably to him. Joseph said unto his master's wife—"How *can* I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" David *could not* go

before the tabernacle to inquire of God.—(1 Chron. xxi. 30.) Jeremiah says, "I *cannot* hold my peace."—(chap. iv. 19.) The Psalmist says, "I am so troubled that I *cannot* speak."—(Ps. lxxvii. 4.) The man who was warm and comfortable in his bed said to his needy neighbour, "I *cannot* rise and give thee." But why can he not rise? Is he infirm or sick, and deprived of the proper use of his limbs? Or is he chained to his bed, or held there by some external force which he *cannot* overcome? The sequel shews whether he could rise or not. Nothing whatever prevented him but a want of will or inclination. He had no wish or desire, when first applied to, to relieve or assist his neighbour; but by importunity his *cannot*, or his *will not*, was removed, and he found power as soon as he found a heart to help.—See Luke xi. 5—8.

The Bible and other books, as well as common conversation, furnish almost innumerable instances of the word CANNOT being employed to express the want, not of *power* or *strength*, but of will or disposition. When we are desired by our friends to do or forbear certain things, there is nothing more common than the reply, I *cannot*—really I *cannot*. But if you press the point, why *can* you *not?* the explanation turns out to be, "Because I am not so disposed; I have no inclination. Other things prevailingly incline my mind another way. In fact, I WILL *not*." It is not the want of *strength*, but the want of *will*, that is thus expressed by the word *cannot*. This being the only kind of impotence or inability that can be assigned as a reason why the sinner does not perform his duty, I maintain, in the proper sense of the terms, that his present strength is equal to his present duty; unless

the meaning of words must be confounded, and that it is proper to say, that an idle fellow, however strong, robust, and healthy, has no power to work; —that the miser, with 5000*l.* a year, does not possess the ability to bestow a shilling upon the poor widow (his neighbour) and her helpless orphans, who are dying for want.

But to proceed:

When the word *cannot* is employed to signify the want of *ability* or *strength*, we affirm that all things are *possible* with God, (Matt. xix. 26.) Or, as expressed by another evangelist, "With God, nothing shall be impossible," (Luke i. 37.) No limits can be fixed to the power and strength of the Almighty. He can do everything, (Job xliii. 2.) But when the word *cannot* is used in the latter sense, to signify a want of inclination, God himself is limited. There are many things which the Lord God Omnipotent *cannot* do. He cannot do evil—he cannot lie—he cannot deny himself. It is impossible for God to lie. This impotence or inability, in the divine Being, cannot arise from a want of power or capacity, strictly speaking, but from his disposition, inclination, or will. God *cannot* look upon iniquity, because it is opposite to his very nature. He is of *purer* eyes than to behold evil. This inability to do evil is the very perfection of holiness in God. It is that which renders him amiable, and the proper object of praise and adoration. The reverse of this inability (namely, a nature or will to do evil,) is the proper object of blame or censure in the creatures. Sinners *cannot* do good, or believe in Christ, because it is opposite to their carnal minds; they have no inclination, will, or disposition to do so. This inability or unwillingness is their wicked-

ness, and their criminality is proportioned exactly to the degree of it. If devils are more wicked than men, it is because they are more *unable* to do good; that is, more unwilling, or more averse to goodness. If this sense of the word *cannot* precluded choice, and left its subjects unable, or without *power*, to act differently, it would totally annihilate the existence of virtue and vice, put an eternal period to praise and blame, and place the angels in heaven, and the devils in hell, upon the same level, as respects obedience or disobedience. Where there is no choice there can be neither transgression nor righteousness. God's impotence to evil is his love to holiness, and this inability in Jehovah is, moreover, is eternal excellency, not because, strictly speaking, he has no power to do evil, but because he has no inclination. All intelligent moral existences, angels and men, are the proper subjects of praise and blame, in exact proportion to their *inability;* that is, their *inclination* to do good or evil.

It is the high praise of some persons, that they *cannot* do evil. It is the glory of God that he *cannot* lie, or be tempted to evil. Paul said, "We *can* do *nothing* against the truth, but for the truth." He that is born of God *cannot* sin. The apostles said, "We *cannot* but speak the things which we have seen and heard." A good tree—that is, a good man—*cannot* bring forth evil fruit. But is it not the foundation of all excellency in God, that he cannot do iniquity? Was it not the excellency of the character of Paul, and of the apostles, that they could not do anything against the truth? and is it not the honour of every child of God, that he cannot sin? But do we perceive any real weakness or

impotence in Jehovah, in Paul, or in the apostles, or the child of God, that rendered it naturally impossible for them to have acted differently? Did not Paul and the apostles possess strength, or power, or ability, in the strict and literal meaning of the terms, to have *opposed* the truth, or to have *held* their peace? If the children of God cannot sin, it is not for want of a power to sin, for universal experience demonstrates the contrary. It must, therefore, be not a natural, but a moral, and, therefore, praiseworthy impotence that constituted them *unable* to *oppose* the truth, to *hold* their peace, or to sin against God. The sole reason was, they were not disposed to act a different part. They were governed by an inward principle of holiness that effectually prevailed upon them to act as they did; and this conduct, arising from such principles, deserves praise, and will be rewarded with "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

It is the everlasting disgrace of some persons that they *cannot* do good. It is the eternal dishonour of Satan and his angels, that *they* cannot do anything pleasing to God. But why can they not? Do they not possess angelic powers? Yes; and the reason of their disgrace is, that they have no wish or desire to employ their abilities to the glory of their Creator. The carnal mind of man is not subject to the law of God; neither, indeed, *can* be. So, then, they that are in the flesh *cannot* please God. But why can they not? Are they weak and without strength in a natural sense, or only wicked? Some men have eyes full of adultery, and cannot cease from sin. But will they whose dear connexions have been dishonoured by them allow they *could not* possibly refrain from such conduct, or have done

otherwise than they did? Will it be contended that such persons are under a fatal *necessity* of thus sinning against both God and man? Will a court of law hold them guiltless on the ground of their inability?

The natural man *cannot* receive the things of the Spirit of God. A corrupt tree, that is, a wicked man, *cannot* bring forth good fruit. The prophet says, concerning some persons, "They *cannot* hearken,"(Jer. vi. 10.) "Ye *cannot* hear my word," says the Saviour, (John viii. 33, 34.) Now what reasons are assigned by the prophet, and by the Redeemer, why they could not hearken or hear? Did they want power or will, a hand or a heart? If they really could not for want of power, they were objects of pity, and not of blame; but if it was solely for want of will or inclination, then they could not be too severely censured. The prophet assigns the reason:—"They *cannot* hearken," says he, because "the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have *no delight* in it." Another prophet expresses himself thus upon the same subject: "They *refused* to hearken, and *pulled* away the shoulder, and *stopped* their ears, that they should not hear: yea, they *made* their hearts as an adamant stone, *lest* they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent by the former prophet." Their *cannot* proves thus to be an obstinate criminal *will not*, and "therefore there came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts," (Zech. vii. 11, 14.) The Jews could not hear the words of Jesus, because they were of their father the devil, and his lusts they were determined to do. Let these instances suffice to shew why a good man cannot do evil, and why a wicked man cannot do

good. The former *hates* sin, and *loves* the law of God; and, therefore, sin hath not the dominion over him. The latter hates God and holiness, and loves iniquity; and, therefore, is the servant of sin, and free from righteousness. He does not *like* to retain God in his knowledge; he hates the light, and loves darkness; and, seeking the honour of his fellow men, he *cannot* believe in Christ. If this inability included a *natural* and physical impossibility to believe, though ever so desirous and willing to do so, it would not be the sinner's crime, but his calamity. This, however, is far from being the case. His impotence is nothing but an aversion to Christ, and his method of salvation; and the greater his inability is in this respect, the greater must be his guilt, and consequent punishment.

It should be remembered by every one, who wishes to form correct notions of his own responsibility to God, that the freedom or liberty with which he acts stamps the character of his actions as virtuous or vicious. Without freedom there can be neither moral good nor evil. If a man is left without choice and power, and is necessitated to take the steps he does take, he is incapable and unworthy of praise or censure proportionable to that necessity. But to explain the nature and limits of freedom or restraint would swell this letter to a disproportionate length. On this point, Watts, Locke, Reid, Priestley, Edwards, &c., may be consulted with advantage. I only add, that the piety of the saint, and the iniquity of the wicked, are approved or condemned of God, in perfect correspondence to the measure of freedom or liberty and choice with which they are performed. The more freely the servant of God walks in the paths

of righteousness, the more acceptable are his works before his great Master; and the more willingly the sinner transgresses the divine law, the more criminal and guilty he appears before a holy God. Love to God and holiness, or love to sin, is the true criterion of character. A man's moral impotence to good or evil will decide his eternal fate.

When I say the sinner *cannot* believe, I mean to express only the sentiment contained in the words of Jesus—"Ye *will not* come to me that ye might have life." But when I affirm that the sinner *can* believe, I wish to convey the idea that there is nothing in heaven or earth to hinder or prevent him but his own wicked disposition; that, in the strict and proper sense of the word, he wants no more power or strength than he has, but only a will or inclination. He has a price in his hand to get wisdom, but, fool as he is, he has no heart to it, (Prov. xvii. 16.)

It is frequently urged that the scripture represents man as utterly unable to understand or believe the gospel; as that, *no man* CAN *come to me*, (John vi. 44.) The world *cannot* receive, (John xiv. 17, viii. 43; Rom. viii. 7.) "All this," says a modern writer, "and whatever else can be urged of the same nature, is admitted. But then, most certainly, this necessity is nothing more than DISINCLINATION. There is no lack of natural abilities. Sinners can love, delight in, and practice sin, and, if they WOULD—if they had not a prevailing inclination to the contrary—a deep-rooted enmity to God—there is nothing that would hinder them from loving him and obeying the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

* Essays on Grace, Faith, and Experience, by Samuel Ecking.

Another writer, of no mean celebrity, has expressed himself upon this point so fully that we cannot mistake his meaning.

"But sinners *cannot obey the call.* This is a truth if truly understood. They are under a *moral,* not a *natural inability.* Is this distinction useless and unintelligible? Is there no difference betwixt a covetous wretch who, with a full purse, hath *no heart,* and a compassionate man who hath *no money* to relieve a fellow-creature in distress? Both are effectually prevented; but, the one *from himself, the other by an external hinderance.* Every generous man at once indignantly condemns the one, and wholly justifies the other. When the case is put, divested of all false colouring, the *one could if he would, and the other would not if he could.* It is said of God, that he *cannot lie.* But whence arises this impossibility? Surely not from *external restraint,* but from the *perfection of his essential holiness.* Satan cannot but hate his Maker; not because of outward force put upon him, but through the horrid malignity of his disposition."

As this point, in my opinion, is of vital importance, and is generally either opposed, overlooked, or misunderstood, I shall make from the writer of the above a pretty long quotation upon the same subject. He observes:—

"If there be no real difference betwixt the *want of natural faculties* and the *want of* moral dispositions, there can be nothing culpable even in Satan's opposing God, and endeavouring the destruction of men; for it is as impossible, at least, that he should do otherwise, as that sinners should perfectly obey the law, or of themselves repent and believe the gospel: and if they are excusable, Satan is conse-

quently so too. Indeed, on this supposition, all characters are reduced to a level; for in proportion to the degree of evil disposition, or *moral inability* to good, evil actions become excusable; and by parity of reason, in proportion to the degree of moral excellency of disposition, or of *moral* inability to evil, good actions, being unavoidable, become less praiseworthy. Thus, the more inwardly holy any man is, the less esteem is his piety, justice, and charity entitled to; for he *can* scarcely do otherwise. An angel, as confirmed in holiness, is still less entitled to commendation; for in *some sense* it is impossible he should do otherwise than be holy. He *cannot* sin. And through *necessary* excellency of nature, it is strictly impossible God should do any thing inconsistent with the most consummate wisdom, justice, truth, and goodness. He *cannot:* and shall we say this inability (which is the incommunicable glory of his nature) renders him less entitled to our admiring, adoring, grateful love, than otherwise he would be?"

Every one must see what confusion would be introduced into civil and domestic concerns if no regard were paid to this distinction, and inveterate propensity were allowed as an excuse for crimes: and it introduces equal perplexity into all our discourses on divine things; because it runs directly counter to all our rules of judging characters and actions. A good outward action without the *least correspondent disposition*, is in reality a *mere hypocrisy:* as the disposition to good and aversion to evil increase, good actions have more *genuine sincerity,* and the character more amiableness. When we can say with the apostles, "We cannot but do" so and so, we are entitled to as much esteem and

approbation as mere men can be. This *moral inability* to evil is much stronger in angels and the spirits of just men made perfect; and therefore we are taught to look forward to such a holy estate and temper as the summit of our wishes and desires; and God himself, who, being under no restraint, but doing his whole pleasure, cannot but be perfectly and unchangeably holy, is proposed as the object of supreme love, admiring gratitude, and adoring praise.

On the other hand, a bad action, if done without *intention*, or the *least disposition to such* moral evil, is deemed purely accidental, and not culpable. When it is contrary to a man's general disposition and character, and the effect of *sudden temptation*, it is considered as more venial than when the effect of a rooted disposition: and for a criminal to plead, " I am so propense to theft and cruelty, that I *could not* help it," would be to condemn himself as the vilest miscreant, not fit to live, in the opinion of judge, jury, and spectators.

There can be no difficulty in proving that this distinction is implied throughout the Bible, and has its foundation in the nature of things; and so far from being novel, it is impossible that a rational creature can be unacquainted with it. No man ever yet *missed the distinction between the sick servant who could not work, and the lazy servant who had no heart to work;* that is, *betwixt natural and moral inability:* and no man could govern even his domestics in a proper manner without continually adverting to it.

" But," say some, " human nature now must be laid low, and grace exalted." Which lays human nature lowest—to rank among the brutes who

have no *power*, or among fallen spirits who have no *disposition*, to love and serve God? Or which most exalts grace—to save a wretch who could not help those crimes for which he is condemned to hell; or to save a rebel, who was *willingly* an enemy to his Maker, and persisted in that *enmity*, till Almighty power, by a new creation, overcame his obstinacy, and made him willing to be reconciled? *

From the clear, full, and undeniable testimony of God—from the perfections of the divine Being—from the nature of man, and his relation to, and dependence on, his Creator—from observation and from experience, I conclude, without any manner of hesitation, that God requires every man, to whom his word is sent, to believe it, and that man's present strength, in the sense in which it has been explained, is equal to the performance of the duty thus imperatively required of him.

I might have availed myself of the distinction between *natural* and *moral* inability; but these terms having been ridiculed by some, and being a stumbling-block to others, I refrain, as much as possible, from the use of them; though I know not any distinction more clear and important, nor any other terms by which the idea can be more fully or forcibly expressed.

"There is," says an able writer, "a *twofold impotence*.

"1. There is a *natural impotence*, which protects from the severity of justice. No man is bound to stop the sun in its course, or to remove mountains.

* Thomas Scott: Sermon on Election, &c., at the Lock Chapel. 3rd Edition. 1798.

For the human nature was never endued with faculties to do those things.

"2. There is a *moral impotence*, which arises from a perverse disposition of the will, and is joined with a delight in sin, and a strong aversion from the holy commands of God; and the more deep and inveterate this is, the more worthy 'tis of punishment. This is the meaning of St. Peter, speaking concerning unclean persons:—*That their eyes are full of adultery, and they cannot cease from sin.* 'Tis from their fault alone that they are without power. His disability to supernatural good arises from an inordinate affectionate to that which is sensual. So that 'tis so far from excusing, that it renders inexcusable being voluntary and vicious. In short, there is so much power not to sin, as is sufficient to sin; that is, that the forbidden action be free, and so become sin."*

It remains that some reasons be offered to support the opinion now given, and that some reply be made to the objections which may be produced against it; but these must be deferred to another opportunity.

I remain, &c.

* Bates's Harmony of the Divine Attributes, pp. 59—61. London: 1675.

LETTER THE FOURTH.

Reasons in favour of the doctrine contended for.

My dear Friend,

Suffer me now to assign a few reasons in support of the opinion, that a man's *ability* to do the will of God is the measure of his *guilt* in not doing it; or, in other words, that a man's *present duty* does not EXCEED his *present strength.*

1. To represent man as unable to believe for want of *strength* or *power*, would exempt him from guilt in not believing. It is a plain dictate of common sense, that a natural impossibility excludes all blame. But an unwilling mind is universally considered as a crime, and not as an excuse, and is the very thing wherein our wickedness consists. That the impotence of the sinner is owing to a disaffection of heart is evident from the promises of the gospel. That inability which consists only in disinclination to the gospel, can never free man from censure. Whereas, when a man *cannot* possibly act otherwise than he does, neither praise nor blame can attach to his conduct. He is, in that respect, a mere machine; his actions being the result of dire necessity, over which he has no control. A man that is really and literally blind has no *choice* whether he will see or not; and, therefore, no blame attaches to him for not looking upon the beauties of creation with which he may be every where surrounded; nor could we consistently exhort him to look upon them. But would not the case be very different if he wilfully shut his eyes against the light, and refused to see any object presented before

him, and also, on this ground, rejected the testimony given respecting the existence and qualities of the object itself? A man that is literally deaf cannot prefer one sound to another. The sound of thunder and that of music are the same to him. He puts no difference whatever between the timbrel and the harp—the stringed instrument and the organ—the sound of the trumpet and the tinkling cymbal. But is he criminal on this account? Is he an object of blame or pity? His case excites our commiseration; but we are conscious of a very different feeling towards the person who, like the adder, is deaf only because he stoppeth his ears, and *will not* hearken to the voice of the charmer, charming ever so wisely. Now, if the sinner be as unable to believe in Christ as the blind man is to see, or the deaf to hear, an incapacity respecting which the will has no choice, I should as soon exhort the blind to see and describe objects and colours, and the deaf to hear and distinguish sounds, as call upon the sinner to believe, and equally charge them with criminality for non-compliance. The one would be no more absurd than the other. Mephibosheth was lame, and could not follow David, however desirous so to do. Was he equally guilty with Ahitophel, who opposed the king, or with Shimei who cursed him? Paul's bodily presence was weak, but surely that was not his fault. Let the sinner prove that he can no more hinder or prevent his unbelief, than Mephibosheth his lameness, or Paul his weakness, and that it is no more his duty to believe, than for them to be sound and strong, and we will readily allow him an exemption from guilt in this respect; and that, if he finally perish for his unbelief, we will grant that he suffers for the non-performance of an impos-

sibility. But would not this associate the divine Being with the Egyptian taskmasters, who required bricks without straw? Would it not justify the complaint of the wicked servant, who said, "I knew thee to be a hard master, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawn"? Whereas, the Bible represents God as requiring no more of any man than he has, be it little or much. "My son, give me thine heart:" that is, give me thyself—thy all. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and soul, and mind, and strength." I only want all thou hast. "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that power or ability a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." If a man have no more power or ability to believe than to create a world, he is no more to blame for not doing the former than the latter. It would be equally just to condemn a man because he is not as beautiful as Absalom, tall as Goliah, or strong as Sampson, as for not possessing and performing that which it was impossible for him to possess or to perform. The Judge of all the earth will do right. If faith be impracticable, unbelief is invincible, and the unbeliever is excusable, unless man is guilty for what he cannot help, however desirous to avoid it; and unless the righteous Judge consign his creatures to eternal misery for not performing impossibilities. Suppose a case. There are two individuals equally needy and destitute. One of them is confined in prison, and can only look through the grating; the other is at perfect liberty, with the free use of all his powers. They are conversing through the grating; I am standing at some distance, and, being acquainted with their circumstances, I invite them both to come

to me, when I will pay their debts, and provide for their future comfort; but neither of them come. Could they both, with equal truth, say, "We *cannot* come." The man immured within the walls of the prison, and secured by doors, and bolts, and bars, might say, without contradiction, "I *cannot* come. *You see it is impossible. I gladly would if I could.*" But can the other use the same language? or, if he does, can he obtain credit? Can the same degree of censure attach to both? The one could not come and receive the gift, unless liberated from prison, and this was not within his control. The other had no impediment but disinclination. If any foreign power be needed, in consequence of a weakness or debility in our natural faculties so interposing between our inclination and performance that, however desirous a person might be to perform his duty, yet, by reason of the demand being above his physical strength, it were impossible, without foreign aid, for him to execute his wish; then, indeed, the want of such aid must be an adequate excuse for his non-performance.* Where there is strictly no power to believe, want of faith is no sin. The wicked and slothful servant was not condemned for not performing a duty beyond his strength, but for neglecting that which was within the compass of his power. He is judged out of his own mouth. He had his Lord's money, but he refused to lay it out. He was only required to use the talent he had, not to use two or five talents which he had not. "Thou *oughtest* to have put my money," saith the Redeemer, "into the bank, or to the exchangers."

* See a Sermon on the Power of God in the Soul of Man, by J. Gilbert.

Nothing impracticable was required of him; and, therefore, he is called a wicked, slothful, unprofitable servant for neglecting his duty, and is cast into outer darkness. His defence proves the reality of his offence. Whoever can, like Adam, frame an excuse for his sin, shews that he possessed abilities to obey. Thus, power abused becomes the measure of the sinner's guilt, and the ground of his condemnation. A man's actions can only be worthy of praise or of blame in proportion to the ability he possessed to have acted differently.

"There was a law in Rome, that those who in a storm forsook the ship, should forfeit all property therein; and the ship and lading should belong entirely to those who staid in it. In a dangerous tempest all the mariners forsook the ship, except only one sick passenger, who, by reason of disease, was unable to get out and escape. So it happened the ship came safe to port. The sick man kept possession, and claimed the benefit of the law; but it was agreed that the sick man was not within the reason of the law. For the reason of making it was, to give encouragement to such as should venture their lives to save the vessel; but this was a merit which he could never pretend to, who neither staid in the ship upon that account, nor contributed anything to its preservation."* "None are damned because they *can* do no better, but because they *will* do no better. *If there were no* WILL *there would be no* HELL. And this will be the very HELL of HELLS, that men have been *felo de se*, self-destroyers."†

2. If men, strictly speaking, are totally destitute

* R. Robinson's Sermons, p. 325.

† Antidote against Arminianism, by Christopher Ness.

of power to believe,—that is, if they are not merely *unwilling* but *unable* to do so,—then, when they do believe, some *new power*, over and above their being *made willing*, must be given them. But what is this power? Can it be defined? Is it some new faculty which the sinner possessed not before? The sinner, equally with the saint, possesses the faculties essential to the human mind or soul. He has an understanding, a will, affections, conscience, &c. But in conversion, is there some new faculty added to these which he did not previously possess? If there be, what shall we term it? Give it a name. Man did not lose his mental faculties by the fall; but he lost his moral goodness or rectitude. His weakness, therefore, as a fallen being, does not consist in the want of faculties or of physical power; if it did, it would excuse him in his most extravagant actions; for no creature can be bound to do that which is simply impossible. For instance, man is not required to fly in the air, as the swallow or the eagle; nor to swim in the sea, as the fishes do; because he is unprovided with needful properties to qualify him for the task. Obedience can only consist in what a man hath a faculty or power to perform. But man is endowed by his Creator with suitable powers and faculties to admit truth from any quarter upon proper evidence, and, therefore, adequate to believe the testimony of God. "Freedom of will," saith Archbishop Usher, "doth as essentially belong to man as reason itself; and he that spoileth him of that power, doth, in effect, make him a very beast."*

The change produced upon a sinner in regeneration, is not effected by communicating new powers

* See Stephens on Original Sin, p. 228. London: 1658

or faculties of mind, but by calling into exercise and giving a right direction to the powers already possessed. A change is produced upon his will, not a new faculty given; and he is made "willing in the day of divine power." The faculties he previously possessed are renovated, the understanding is enlightened, the judgment convinced, the affections called from earthly things, and set on things above, and the whole bias and bent of the will is radically changed. But then these are not new physical powers or faculties, but identically the same which the sinner previously possessed. In fact, the contrary supposition would destroy the identity of the man, and make the sinner and the saint two, not only different, but separate persons; in which case, the repentance of the saint could not avail the sinner, it being the repentance of another man; nor could the criminality of the sinner be any injury to the saint, for it would be the conduct of a distinct person. The faculties which were disordered by sin, and employed in the service of Satan, are rectified by divine influence, and converted to the use for which they were originally given. The strength communicated is not natural or physical power, but of a moral kind; i. e., a disposition to love, fear, and serve God.

3. If a man, who has the Bible in his hand, cannot believe, though he desire to do so, is he not under the fatal necessity of making God a liar? (1 John v. 10.) Besides, if he cannot believe, he cannot obey the gospel; and if he do not obey it, must he not be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of God, and from the glory of his power? and does not this make his condemnation inevitable?

The preaching of the gospel is said to be the savour of life unto life to some, and of death unto death to others. But how will it be the means of increasing or aggravating the man's guilt, who refuses or rejects it only because he is naturally and necessarily unable to comply with it? On this principle, Christ may indeed be set for the rising of many in Israel; but not for the fall of any; for how can they be said to reject the Saviour who have no power to embrace him?

Ministers of the gospel are commanded to warn sinners of their danger, and to beseech them to be reconciled to God. And are not sinners who neglect these warnings, and continue in impenitence and unbelief, rendered inexcusable, and their sin and misery augmented thereby? (Matt. xi. 20—24; Heb. ii. 1—5; 2 Cor. ii. 14—16; Prov. i. 20—35.) But if man has no power to comply with the exhortations, where is the reasonableness of enforcing them?

Had the Jews laboured under any natural inability or want of capacity to embrace the Redeemer when he came to them as to his own people, how could they be criminal in rejecting him? Surely, upon this principle, their case ought rather to be viewed as pitiable than blameable, and the heavy judgment inflicted upon them for more than seventeen hundred years for rejecting him, must be regarded severe and undeserved!

I apprehend that the conscience of every man will tell him that he ought to serve God, and that there is nothing in his way to prevent him doing so, but his own criminal unwillingness. Is it not upon this very principle that men's thoughts accuse them? A conviction of this will strike them speechless at

the day of judgment, and be to them a source of misery through eternity. "*Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?* You are not properly qualified to be here. Whose fault is it? I allow you liberty to account for your conduct. Speak! Is it my fault? are there no habits in my wardrobe? Is it the fault of my servants? Have not the rest of my guests wedding garments? Is it *your* fault? Is the *wedding ready; are all things ready;* and are you who were *bidden not worthy?* How camest thou in hither? Speak! And he was speechless. He could make no reply to such reasonable questions. Here lies the agony of a man in trouble; and his anguish would abate if he could satisfy himself that he was brought into his present condition not through his own neglect. He would then cease to be an object of blame, and would become an object of pity; and the least that his judge would do for him would be to put him out of his misery. How hard must a man be driven to find reasons for his sin, when his only hope is, that his destruction will be attributed, not to himself, but to God. What a desperate venture; rather, what a raving madness! Jesus Christ hath considered and determined the case; and he affirms the lost man will be *speechless;* but the lost man saith, he also hath considered the case, and affirms, in contradiction to Jesus Christ, he shall not be speechless, but shall have to say, that God himself was the author of his destruction. If punishment be the effect of sin, it is impossible to charge God with our punishment, unless we first charge him with our sin, which would be abominable.——There is not a single article in the whole Christian religion to countenance the pretence of laying the blame on God; nothing

in the doctrine of decrees, nothing in the doctrine of man's depravity, nothing in the doctrine of divine assistance, nothing in any doctrine to countenance such a plea.——The scripture, so far from excusing an impenitent man, renders all his excuses to the last degree contemptible. If the Bible were a hard book, he might complain of difficulty; if the benefits of religion were sold at a high price, he might complain of poverty; if he had made trial and could not succeed, he might complain of providence; but, if nothing of this can be said, there is no remedy, and the impenitent, before his Judge, must be *speechless*."* But how could they feel their damnation to be just, if they were punished for the neglect of what they never had the power to perform? Would they not, upon that supposition, consider their Judge as acting a most unjust part?

"A righteous God puts upon no man the Egyptian task of making brick without straw, nor requires any thing of us, in order to our salvation, which we cannot perform; that being, in effect, to require impossible conditions of salvation from us."†

Again—"Can, then, a good and gracious God be angry with me, or condemn me, for my unwilling mistakes, when I have done all that was in my power to avoid them?"‡

Again—"A righteous God can expect nothing from us but what he has given us the means, the ability to perform. He is not a rigid Master, who would reap where he did not sow. This would be cruel mockery, unworthy of that Being who has brought life and immortality to light. And a

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* R. Robinson's Sermons, p. 329—333.

† Dr. Whitby's Last Thoughts, p. 40. ‡ Ibid. p. 40.

righteous God will condemn no man for not doing more than he was able to perform."*

4. That man's aversion, free, voluntary aversion to God, to Christ, to holiness, to the divine law, to the glorious gospel, is the sole and only reason why he cannot, that is, *will not* believe in Christ, can never be successfully controverted; because his inability to believe is the very ground of his condemnation. Why are sinners blamed? Is it not because they have an evil heart of unbelief? The carnal mind is enmity against God, and refuses to be reconciled to him, (Heb. iii. 12—19; 2 Cor. v. 19, 20; John iii. 18—21.) Were not this the case, the slothful servant would have a strong plea, and the proceedings of God, in his final condemnation, could not be vindicated. But the Lord says, "I called, and ye refused; ye would have none of my counsel; ye hated my reproof, and hardened your hearts against me," &c. (Prov. i.) The sinner is hearty in his opposition to God. His heart is fully set in him to do evil, (Eccl. viii. 11.) He does it earnestly with both hands, and bids the Almighty to depart from him, saying, "I have loved strangers, and after them I will go," (Jer. ii. 25.) He shuts his eyes that he cannot see, and stops his ears that he cannot hear; breaks the bands of Christ asunder, and casts away his cords from him, saying, "I will not have this man to reign over me," (Ps. ii. 3; John v. 40; Luke xix. 14.) God now complains: "I have called, and ye refused," &c. "I will therefore laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh." On this ground, the sinner's mouth is stopped; his guilt is established, and the

* Dr. Whitby's Last Thoughts, p. 167.

severity, the righteous severity of God in his condemnation, will be justified and applauded before the whole world. But this could never be the case if man's strength was unequal to his duty. God does not reap where he has not sown, nor require his creatures to perform impossibilities. He condemns men only for abusing or neglecting the power they possess. He makes the man's *will*, not his *power*, the ground of praise or censure.

"The impotency of sinners, with respect to believing in Christ, is not natural, but *moral*. For it is a plain dictate of common sense, that natural impossibility excludes all blame. But an unwilling mind is universally considered as a crime, and not as an excuse, and is the very thing wherein our wickedness consists. That the impotence of the sinner is owing to a disaffection of heart, is evident from the *promises* of the gospel. When any object of good is proposed and promised to us upon asking, it clearly evinces that there can be no impotency in us with respect to obtaining, besides the disapprobation of the *will*, and that inability which consists in disinclination never renders any thing improperly the subject of precept or command."* Such inability can never be pleaded in extenuation or excuse for crime.

I remain, &c.

* Sketches and Hints of Church History, by Dr. John Erskine, pp. 281, 282. Edinburgh: 1790.

LETTER THE FIFTH.

Other arguments to prove the extent of man's ability to discharge his duty.

My dear Friend,

If sinners are not under any obligation to believe the gospel, as some maintain, or if they are utterly destitute of power to comply with that obligation, the *duty* and *necessity* of true repentance for past unbelief will be entirely superseded. For if it is not my duty to believe, I cannot be justly charged with sin for not believing. A non-performance of that which is nowhere required cannot be considered as a criminal omission. Where there is no previous obligation expressed or implied there can be no failure in point of duty. The essence of iniquity lies in doing what is forbidden, or neglecting what is commanded. "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law; for sin is the transgression of the law." This language of the beloved disciple is also confirmed by the apostle of the Gentiles; for he affirms that, "where no law is there is no transgression." If sinners, therefore, are not bound to believe, by the code of laws which God has given to men, their unbelief can never be construed into a crime; and consequently they can never sincerely repent of that which does not constitute them guilty before God. How shall I grieve when I have a conviction of mind that I have not done amiss? or when I am fully persuaded I have not transgressed any law? I may be sorry for other parts of my conduct, but unbelief, on this principle, is perfectly innocent. This is the fair and legitimate inference from the premises that faith is not required from all

men who are possessed of rational powers, and favoured with divine revelation. But how contrary is it to the oracles of divine truth! The Redeemer says, that, "When he (the Spirit of Truth) is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me."" But how could the Holy Spirit reprove them of sin for not believing on Jesus Christ, if it was not their duty so to believe? Surely the Spirit of God cannot err in his reproofs, and charge men with crimes when they have not neglected a duty nor transgressed a law. The inference cannot be denied. If they were not under obligation to believe, their not believing could not be a sin; and if not a sin, it could not be represented as such by the Spirit of Infallible Truth.

This difficulty is not removed by saying that it was his duty to believe, but he was destitute of power to perform it. For wherever duty exceeds power it must necessarily be unperformed; and if non-performance ensure criminality and punishment, the unbeliever must be punished for that which it was utterly impossible for him to avoid. This is charging God with a conduct of which every good man would be ashamed—namely, punishing by mere prerogative. And "shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his Maker?" "The Judge of all the earth will do right." "With righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity." "And the heavens shall declare his righteousness, for God is Judge himself." "Every mouth shall be stopped." The condemned sinner will be speechless. If any objection could be supposed to be made by the sinner, he would, with the slothful

and wicked servant, be condemned out of his own mouth. The Lord will be clear when he judgeth, and will overcome when he is judged, (Ps. li. 4; Rom. iii. 6.) But let this sentiment be supposed, that God requires of man what he cannot possibly perform, and then condemns him to endless misery for the non-performance, and we may suppose the condemned sinner would say—"Lord, I cannot resist thy power with success, nor can I escape from thine omnipotent hand. I must of necessity bear whatever thou choosest to inflict. I have no remedy, no redress from thee, and from thy bar there lies no appeal. But I think it extremely hard, and contrary to all the principles of justice and equity, and to all the rules of judgment among mankind, to condemn any man for the non-performance of an absolute impossibility. I never had any power to believe on Jesus Christ. Thou knowest I could with equal ease have torn the sun from the firmament, measured the waters of the sea in the hollow of my hand, or made a world of angels and men, as have believed on the Saviour of sinners. There was no more possibility of my performing what thou requiredst of me than of the dead rising from their graves and performing the functions of life. What justice or equity can there be in my condemnation? Are the dead condemned for lying still? Is it criminal in them not to see, to hear, and to move? To condemn one for that which he cannot perform would be considered in the world of mankind as an unjust and cruel stretch of arbitrary power. To suppose an infant is required to move a weight which would require the strength of Sampson, and then to be condemned for not removing it, is a fair representation of my case. I was

required to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, which I could no more do than I could bear the earth on the palm of my hand; and yet I must be condemned eternally for my unbelief. As well might a man without feet be condemned for not walking, or a man without eyes for not seeing, as a sinner, without power to believe, for not believing. But I must submit to my fate, and sink under an act of sovereignty, the righteousness of which I am unable to discern. In the dark regions of everlasting misery I shall, however, have this one thought to console me, and to make my sufferings somewhat more tolerable to myself,—I am suffering for the want of that which I never had the possibility of possessing. My portion is what I could not avoid. I have not the painful reflection that I have wilfully brought this upon myself, for I could not help it."

Unbelievers who are now suffering the vengeance of eternal fire, might reason in this manner, if it never was in their power to believe. And can it be once thought that a God of infinite goodness and justice will leave it in the power of his enemies to indulge any such reflections on his unchanging decision? God forbid! All intelligent moral agents shall be made to acknowledge the equity of the divine conduct. "Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints," (Rev. xv. 3.) "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments," (Rev. xvi. 7.) "Thou art righteous, O Lord! which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus," (v. 5.) I am, therefore, decidedly of opinion that faith not only is the sinner's duty, but that (in the sense in which power has been explained) he possesses power adequate to the performance of his duty, were he inclined to employ

it for that purpose, or else he can never sincerely repent of his unbelief in time or in eternity. Repentance is self-accusation. But how can I accuse myself of what I could not help, and of not producing that which I had not ability to produce. I never repent of my complexion, my size, the length of my fingers or my arms. I have no control over these things, and therefore, though I may be pleased or pained with them, I never think of repenting on their account. And if I have no more power or control over my unbelief than over them, I could never sorrow over it unto repentance.

Let us beware that we do not charge God foolishly nor speak wickedly for him. God is righteous, and will vindicate his character and conduct from all unjust impeachments and imputations. "Thou thoughtest I was altogether such a one as thyself, but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now, consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver." Does God, the Holy One and the just, address this language to one who cannot consider; to one who is unable to believe him, or pay attention to his word? And will he, notwithstanding, tear him in pieces? Let us not impute that to the righteous Lord, who loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity, which any earthly magistrate or judge would consider a wicked and malicious libel if imputed to him in his public capacity. Let us be wise, therefore, that we do not heap up wrath for ourselves against the day of wrath, and of the revelation of the *righteous* judgment of God.

The fall may have impaired even man's natural powers, yet the scripture does not anywhere represent man's *natural* weaknesses either of body or

mind as criminal and punishable. In consequence of original sin, some persons are born lame, or blind, or deaf, or dumb, and some with a very small share of intellect or rational faculties. This is obvious to all. But do we blame men, or does God blame men, for the want of these powers? I believe not. Nor are these persons required to use and exercise those natural powers which they have not. No fault was found with Bartimeus for being blind, nor with Leah for being blear-eyed, nor with the man who was laid daily at the gate of the temple called beautiful, because he had been lame from his mother's womb. And as bodily infirmities, though the result of sin, are not criminal in themselves, nor grounds of punishment with God or man, so the natural infirmities or weaknesses of the mind are not a just cause of blame, because they are not objects of choice over which the will has control. But if a man, by a voluntary act of his own, puts out his eyes, stops his ears, or maims his limbs, he is justly censured and condemned. Or, if the blind, or the deaf, or the lame, had an opportunity of being restored to sight, hearing, and soundness, and voluntarily refused to receive or accept the cure, their defects may be considered wilful from that period, and consequently sinful. Of such it might be said—"This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." Thus they approve their situation, and prefer it to the change that is proposed. This will apply to the sinner. His blindness and deafness are chosen, and therefore criminal.

That for which we are truly accountable to God is the use or abuse of the powers or talents which

we possess. If we have one or ten talents, or twenty, or a hundred, we must account to our Lord and Judge for what he has bestowed, not for more, nor for less. Hence, where much is given, much is required; where little is given, little is required. God only commands us to trade with that which he has committed to our trust. He will not reap, or require to reap, where he has not sown, nor to reap even there but in proportion as he has sown. Man is responsible to his Maker for what he has received from him, both as to body and mind. I therefore infer, that God does not require that of any of his creatures, under pain of his eternal displeasure, which the creature has not natural powers and faculties to perform.

While, however, all this is true, God does require that of sinners which they have no *will* to perform. To deny this, would imply that the will of man is the rule of his duty, and that he could not sin so long as he followed his own inclination, which would involve innumerable contradictions and absurdities. For if man is not obliged to do anything but what he is disposed to do, and he follows his own disposition, he will of course never do wrong, but be the subject of sinless obedience and perfection. Thus, repentance for sin, and prayer for pardon, would be superseded, and we might at least blot these words out of the Lord's Prayer—"Forgive us our trespasses." Man's absolute weakness, or want of natural power to perform his duty, would extenuate, if not excuse failure; but his unwillingness is the very soul and sum of his crime. Men, therefore, are condemned, not because they *cannot*, but because they *will* not serve the Lord.

The Rev. Joseph Trueman, who was ejected, in

1662, from Crumwell, in Nottinghamshire, wrote a Treatise upon Natural and Moral Impotence. In his address to the reader, he lays down three propositions which cannot reasonably be controverted:—

"*First.*—That no man is justly bound by any law of God or man, any further than his *natural* powers or faculties reach.

"*Secondly.*—That a man is so bound by the law of God, as that his *greatest wickedness*, or the *strongest aversation of his will* from the law, will not *excuse* his disobedience, but must really add to his inexcusableness and criminality.

"*Thirdly.*—Such wickedness or aversation of the will from God will most *assuredly hinder* a man's cordial compliance with the divine commands, until God shall take away or overcome that reluctance or opposition to the will, by some such superfluence of grace as he is not bound in justice either to afford unto any man or else hold him excused."

"A man's culpable impotence lieth only in an impotence to do what he hath power to do."

"No man's dislike to a good law can exempt him from an obligation to obey it."*

I remain, &c.

* See Theological Magazine, vol. i. p. 217.

LETTER THE SIXTH.

Reply to Objections.

My dear Friend,

Having explained the terms, and offered a few reasons to prove that man's *present strength* is equal to his *present duty*, I now proceed to notice some objections which are raised against the doctrine. Before I do this, however, I wish to remind you, that I firmly believe in the scriptural doctrines of predestination, and eternal, personal, and particular election, particular redemption, and effectual, invincible grace, in the conversion, sanctification and perseverance of the elect, and I most strenuously maintain that sovereign grace reigns in the salvation of sinners from first to last, (Eph. i. 3—5; 1 Pet. i. 6; Titus iii. 5—7, &c.)

If the sentiment for which I now contend is proved to be at variance with these scripture doctrines, with Christian experience, or the perfections of God, I would renounce it at once without hesitation. But I think these things are perfectly harmonious, and that it is only by their union we can embrace a whole Bible, abase man, and exalt the Saviour. On this hypothesis, grace and justice shine with peculiar splendour—grace in the salvation of the vilest, and justice in the condemnation of those who neglect the great salvation, and will not have Christ to reign over them. The causes of salvation and condemnation are very different and distinct, arising even from opposite sources. Blended and confused and inaccurate views of them are, I apprehend, the source of the objections against the sentiment de-

fended, some of which I take the liberty to state, and to state them as fully and strongly as I can.

Objection 1. The scripture declares expressly that faith is of the operation of God—that it is *given* to saints to believe—that *faith* is the gift of God, (Col. ii. 12; Phil. i. 29; Eph. ii. 8.) How will these declarations accord with the idea of man's obligation and ability to believe without divine or supernatural influence? Can that which is the *gift* of God be the *duty* of man? "*Will any man tell me that it is my duty to do that* WITHOUT *divine assistance which I can only do* WITH *it?*"

Though I think the first of these texts (Col. ii. 12) is misunderstood and misapplied, yet I will not avail myself of that, to weaken the objection, for I most readily admit that faith is the gift of God, and that no sinner ever did, or ever will believe to the saving of the soul, without the energetic influence of the Holy Spirit. Saving faith was never found in any one but where the Lord bestowed it. But how does this affect the question? May not that be required of man as a duty, which, from the depravity of his nature, he will never perform unaided by divine influence? Are not repentance, faith, love, fear, &c., represented as the duties of men, and also as the fruits of the Spirit? As blessings, they are gifts of God; as duties, they are the acts of men. If nothing which is the gift of God is the duty of man, then duty itself is annihilated, and the very word ought to be struck out of the religious vocabulary. There certainly is nothing in man, or done by man, that is truly good, but as God works in him of his own good pleasure. "It is a just observation, of great weight in theology, that the very same

disposition and exercises of heart may be viewed both as duties and as acts of grace: duties as required of us, as accountable creatures; graces, as wrought in us by the operations of God's Holy Spirit."* "When faith and repentance are the Spirit's work, *believing* and *repenting* are *our* acts. Thus, we take not the Spirit's work into our hand, nor exhort others so to do herein. *With the heart* man *believeth*, (Rom. x. 10.) So it is *man* that repenteth. Hence it is, that men are exhorted to believe and repent as that which is their *duty*."† If no disposition of mind, nor any action of life, which is eventually produced by divine influence, was previously matter of duty, it was not the sinner's duty to be thankful for mercies, nor to confess his sins, nor to pray for pardon, nor to love God or his people, nor to forgive injuries, nor to be patient, nor penitent, nor humble; for wherever any one of these is found in truth, it is, without doubt, the effect of divine influence. I have no hesitation in saying, that faith is the gift of God, and at the same time affirming, that it is the sinner's duty to believe.

That faith is the gift of God wherever it is found, is evident from the consideration, that the sinner loves sin and hates the Saviour. He will not come to Christ, nor have him to reign over him. In this state of mind the sinner will for ever remain, if no supernatural influence is exerted upon him, unless it can be supposed that there is in a heart, full of enmity to God, a self-renovating principle to cure itself. But this supposition is full of absurdity and contradiction. The sinner cannot love what he at

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* Bennett on the Gospel Dispensation.

† Beart's Eternal Law and Everlasting Gospel, part ii. p. 70.

the same time hates, nor choose what he dislikes. He will invariably choose that which is most agreeable to him, and that, to a carnal mind, is not holiness nor Christ, but sin; and, therefore, if ever he is brought to believe to the saving of his soul, he will freely acknowledge his faith to be the gift of God. "By the grace of God I am what I am."

That faith is man's duty is no less evident, because he that believeth not must, on that very account, eternally perish. We maintain that faith is commanded in the law; not in express words indeed, but by necessary consequence. For the law commands us to love God with all our heart, and to obey him in all things, and, therefore, to believe him when speaking, whatever it may be which he says or enjoins. Adam was bound to have faith in God, and to believe he would be faithful to his promises. Nor does our obligation to believe the gospel arise from any thing else than from that obligation by which man, before he sinned, was bound to believe every word of his Creator.

In vain it is objected that faith in Christ was not commanded to Adam before the fall, for neither was he forbidden to mix with idolaters, &c. When the apostle says, that the law is not of faith, his meaning is, not that faith is in no respect enjoined in the law, but that justification by faith in Christ is neither taught nor promised in the law.

The law is perfect, requiring the utmost perfection of every duty. And if so, it must most certainly require faith in Jesus Christ.*

To deny this, is to cancel the sinner's obligation to every religious duty; for no exercise, whether

* See Bell's Notes to Witsius's Irenicum.

external or internal, such as prayer, repentance, love, &c., is accepted of God unless performed in faith. Where faith is struck out of the list of duties, the whole tablet is erased at once, for faith virtually contains them all. Thus man is freed completely from duty, sin, and punishment. Such are the unavoidable consequences of denying that to be the duty of man which, he being unwilling to perform, is also represented to be the gift of God. Man yields no acceptable obedience to God till he believes, and he never believes without divine influence. This is only saying, that no man ever discharged his duty to God of his own accord. But to say that no man *can* do his duty because no one actually does it, is not conclusive reasoning, nor such as men would admit if applied to their own secular concerns, families, and servants. Such kind of reasoning would prove that man is neither obliged nor able to perform any duty he is unwilling to perform, and thus his own will becomes the measure of his duty, and consequently he cannot sin, so long as he follows his own inclination.

But it is still reiterated, "How can that be my duty which is the gift of God?" or, admitting it to be my duty, "How can I do that without divine assistance which I can only do with it?"

That faith is the gift of God, and yet the duty of man, has been proved already; and I now ask, Why cannot man believe? Is not the Bible true? Is not the sinner to whom it is sent deeply concerned in its contents? He must be judged by them at the last day. The things belonging to his peace are clearly revealed, and made plain and easy to be understood. Man possesses extraordinary abilities. His invention of machinery, and his researches into

the very arcana of nature, are wonderful. Would not the same powers, if honestly employed, be sufficient to examine, understand, and credit the report of the gospel? It is not more difficult, nor can it require more power or strength, to believe the testimony of Him that cannot lie, than to believe the testimony of a weak, fallible man. Yet men can credit their fellow mortals in matters of great importance, where property, reputation, and even life itself are concerned. The historian, the merchant, the lawyer, the physician, are believed and trusted. In civil courts and religious societies, human testimony decides cases of vast importance. Even the accounts in common public papers respecting distant places, persons, and transactions, are believed and acted upon with unhesitating confidence. If, then, we receive the witness of men, who are liable to deceive and to be deceived, how much more ought we to receive the witness of Him who cannot lie? If it be said, that it is agreeable to fallen nature to believe the testimony of man in things relating to this world, but not to believe the word of God, the concession will yield all I contend for, namely, that man's disinclination to God and truth is the sole reason why he does not believe. It is not agreeable to him; he loves darkness rather than light. Let every man, however, prepare to answer the Redeemer's inquiry—"If I say the truth, *why* do ye not believe me?" Will any man be able, at the day of judgment, to reply—"Lord, *I could not* believe thee. It was impossible. I had no more power to believe, than I had to fix the day of my birth"? No, every unbeliever will be speechless in that day. Every plea that he could possibly use would only tend to prove that he was not destitute of power to believe,

but of inclination. He was sinfully opposed to the testimony of God and to the way of salvation by Jesus Christ. This was the only hinderance, and, being the very state of the heart, it remains till God by his sovereign grace removes it, and makes the sinner willing to embrace the gospel. It is, therefore, very evident that faith is the sinner's duty, and, at the same time, wherever it exists, "it is the gift of God." This is no contradiction. "He that believeth not shall be damned." "Unto you it is given to believe."

Objection 2. The scripture represents man as dead in trespasses and in sins, (Eph. ii. 1—5; 2 Cor. v. 14, 15,)—is it not, therefore, absurd to call upon them to believe, or repent, or perform any act? or, if we do, to suppose they can yield any compliance with our requisitions?

"This objection is started by some," says the late Archibald Mc Lean, "with a view to repel all exhortations to unbelievers; for, say they, since man, in his natural state, is as unable to do anything spiritually good as the dead in the grave, he can with no propriety be exhorted to anything while in that state."

To this objection he replies, by proving that "it implies a denial of the corruption of human nature —of the holy law as the rule of obedience—repels the evidence, calls, and invitations of the gospel—sets aside all use of means, either in the hand of God or on the part of the creature; and, lastly, considers a *moral* or *spiritual* death in sin as, in all respects, answering to the natural death of the body."

On these points, this acute writer reasons with his usual strength, and completely meets and overturns

the objection. Had his work fallen under my notice before I had written these sheets, I might have availed myself more of his assistance.

He observes, "When the body is deprived of the animating spirit, it differs nothing from a lump of dust or clay; in which case, it cannot be the subject of instruction, commands, praise, or blame. Were spiritual death to be considered in this light, then it would follow that men in a natural state could not be sinners. In short, this view of the matter would set aside all moral obligation upon mankind; and, were it really to be believed, would obliterate all conviction of guilt. The scripture gives a very different view of the death in trespasses and sins. It consists—1. In the *guilt* of sin, whereby they are under the sentence of death denounced in the law. 2. In the indwelling *power* and dominion of sin, whereby their minds are blinded, and their hearts and affections alienated from the life of God, and set upon opposite objects, (Eph. iv. 18.) In this sense, they are dead while they live. This kind of death, therefore, does not exclude means; otherwise, their guilt could never be heightened by being proof against them."*

Unregenerate men are not dead in every sense of the word. They are naturally alive with respect to their bodies, and, in this sense, perform the functions of life. They are alive as rational and intelligent beings, and hence they attend to the various affairs of trade and commerce, and all the concerns of their families and of the world. Of some men we say, "They are quite *alive* to the world;" and of others, "They are *dead* to their own interest." Here we

* Mc Lean on the Calls and Invitations of the Gospel.

use the terms figuratively, and why may not they be so employed in the Bible? If men are determined not to examine the context of the place, and the scope of a writer, but to fix the same idea to the same word wherever it occurs, they will be incapable of understanding many subjects with any degree of accuracy, and even divine revelation will be ineffectual to produce conviction. In this case, he that is ignorant will be ignorant still. Paul was alive before he was converted. "I was alive without the law once," (Rom. vii. 9.) In regeneration he died. "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." "I, through the law, am dead to the law," (Gal. ii. 19.) Hence, he speaks of believers as dead. "For ye are dead," (Col. iii. 3.) "He that is dead is freed from sin." "Likewise, reckon ye yourselves to be dead unto sin," (Rom. vi. 7, 11.) Would not this language be misunderstood and misrepresented were we to infer that believers are dead, and, therefore, are as unable and as destitute of power to do any thing as the dead in their graves? This would outrage common sense, and do great violence to the sacred Scriptures. Believers are dead to sin—that is, they do not delight in it,—they are not alive to it. "How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" (Rom. vi. 2.) It is said of them, that "they cannot sin," (1 John iii. 9.) But dare we affirm that no regenerate man ever sinned? What would become of the characters of Noah and Lot, David and Peter, and, indeed, of all the saints, upon such a principle? The saint, then, is alive to God and dead to sin, in the same sense that the unregenerate are dead to God and alive to sin; or, in other words, dead in trespasses and in sins. As it is not naturally impossible but that

the believer, though dead to sin, may fail in point of duty, so it is not naturally impossible for the sinner, though dead in sins, to attend to his duty. On this principle it is, that the saint is warned of his danger, and exhorted to watch and pray, lest he enter into temptation; and the sinner commanded to flee from the wrath to come, and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. With respect to sinners dead in sin, did not God reason with Cain; and, by his Spirit, in the ministry of Noah, strive with the old world? Jonah preached to the Ninevites, and God, by his prophets, stretched forth his hands to a gainsaying and disobedient people. The scribes and the pharisees, though dead in sins, were repeatedly warned and exhorted by Christ and his apostles. But there could be no propriety, or sincerity, in such addresses were we to suppose the death of the sinner in all respects to resemble that of the human body literally dead.

It is said by some, that God may, and that he does require from his creatures that which it is impossible for them to perform, because he can, along with the command, convey a power of compliance. The man with his withered arm was commanded to stretch it forth; he did so, and it was restored whole as the other. The sick are commanded to arise and walk, and the dead are called from their graves. "Lazarus, come forth!" It will be said, that it cannot be more improper to call upon dead sinners to perform their duty, than thus to command the sick, the lame, the dead, to do what was absolutely impossible; because God can, in one instance as well as the other, convey power with the word of command, which shall effectually ensure obedience. But is there not a material difference in the cases?

In the instance of the sinner, he is threatened with eternal death if he does not comply with the command. But was that the case with respect to Lazarus, or the man with the withered hand? Transfer the threatening to them, and observe its impropriety.

"If man wanted faculties, this want would excuse him in his most extravagant actions. For no creature is bound to that which is simply impossible to him. If we were required to become angels, or to pluck the sun from the firmament, these would be things impossible to our nature as such, and, therefore, there could be no disobedience nor fault in our not doing them. For disobedience is only in what a man hath a faculty to do. But to love God and to serve him, to praise him and depend upon him, are things suitable to the nature and faculties with which God hath endued us, and the disability lies chiefly in the will; the weakness is moral, (John v. 40—44,) and arises from a wilful obstinacy and perverseness. So that man, as a creature, has a power, or natural faculties, to believe in and to love God; but as corrupted by a sinful nature, derived to him from his first parents, and increased by a custom in sin, he cannot believe, cannot love God, cannot bring himself into a good frame; still the reason why he cannot, is to be sought for in his moral weakness and depravity."*

"None shall be able to say at that day, that they missed of the salvation of Christ for want of sufficient natural powers to lay hold of it and receive it. Sinners who hear the gospel have a natural understanding to take in the meaning of the word preached; they have also a will to accept or refuse

* Beart's Eternal Law and Everlasting Gospel, part ii. p. 75, note.

the proposals of grace, to receive or reject this all-sufficient Saviour. But there is an aversion in them to attend to and obey the gospel through the corruption of their nature by original sin; their minds will not learn divine things, because they shut their eyes; their wills refuse to receive the grace of the gospel; they shut it out of their hearts; they have a delight in sin, a dislike of Christ, and of his salvation, which consists in holiness and the love of God; they have a rooted obstinacy of will against the methods of divine mercy. *This is their condemnation* (John iii. 19), *that light came into the world, and they loved darkness rather than light*, and, therefore, they must die in their sins, because *they would not come to Christ that they might have life*," (John v.40.)*

It is extremely dangerous to stretch figurative language beyond the proper bounds limited by the nature of the subject. It would be unspeakably absurd and ridiculous to go into Bunhill Fields, or any other grave-yard, and exhort the dead to arise, and threaten them with eternal damnation if they did not instantly do so. The man who should do it would be considered insane. And if the cases were analogous, the same remarks would apply to the preacher who would exhort sinners to repent and believe upon pain of being "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power," (2 Thess. i. 7—9.) The sinner's death does not relate to his power or strength, but to his disposition and his will. And the more unable he is in this respect to do the will

* Dr. Watts's Works: Sermon on Election, or, vol. i. p. 550. See the same author, vol. iii. p. 478, where he states and defends the sentiment contended for in these letters.

of God, the more criminal he is represented in the Bible. But if death was taken strictly, there could be no degrees of crime. Either all must be exonerated, or all equally condemned. There are no degrees in death. The death of the sinner, therefore, is of a moral kind, consisting in the total depravity of his nature, his prevailing love to sin, and his constant perfect aversion to God and his holy law, which constitute the very essence of his guilt before God."

OBJECTION 3. The idea of man's present ability or strength being equal to his duty, is directly contrary to our Lord's assertion, "No man can come unto me except the Father which sent me draw him," (John vi. 44,) and also to the apostle's own experience even after his conversion: "The good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do, (Rom. vii. 15—25.)

In reply to what is said, John vi. 44, it is freely granted that sinners are not inclined to come to Christ, and that they cannot come till they are disposed to do so, nor will they be disposed to come till Christ appear to them an agreeable and desirable object. But he cannot appear so to a carnal mind; and, therefore, as Dr. Gill says upon the text, "Whilst men are in a state of unregeneracy and blindness, they see no need of coming to Christ, nor any thing in him worth coming for; they are prejudiced against him, and their hearts are set on other things." The sum is, that man's inability to come to the Saviour for life, as has been abundantly proved, lies exclusively in his will, and is the very essence of his crime. He cannot come until he is willing to come, and his heart is so directly opposed

to Jesus, and his aversion to him is so strong, that nothing short of Almighty grace can make him willing. We may with equal propriety expect hatred to convert itself into love, and darkness to become light, or a corrupt fountain to send forth pure streams, or that we should gather grapes and figs from thorns and thistles, as expect that any sinner will come to Jesus, except he is drawn by the Father, and made willing in the day of his power.

"The act of drawing is an act of power, but not of force. God, in drawing of unwilling, makes willing in the day of his power; he enlightens the understanding, bends the will, gives an heart of flesh, sweetly allures by the power of his grace, and engages the soul to come to Christ, and give up itself to him. He draws with the bands of love."*

Man's inability to come to Christ is nothing but his disinclination, and this, though the very essence of his crime, will never be overcome by any thing short of Almighty influence.

But does it follow from hence that because he hates God, that therefore he ought not to love him? That because your servant will not work, that therefore literally he cannot and is excusable? and that he must not and ought not to be called to work, nor blamed and punished for neglect? Surely there is a difference between being unable and unwilling, though the latter may as effectually, and as certainly, prevent exertion and obedience as the former.

"The meaning of this *cannot* is on obstinate *will not*: as the Jews could not hear Stephen, (Acts vii.

* Dr. Gill, on John vi. 44.

57,) nor Paul, (Acts xxii. 22.) Note, the rooted antipathy of men's corrupt hearts to the doctrine of Christ is the true reason of their ignorance of it, and their errors and mistakes about it. They do not like it nor love it, and therefore they will not understand it; like Peter, who pretended he knew not what the damsel said, (Matt. xxvi. 70,) when in truth he knew not what to say to it. Ye cannot hear my words, for you have stopped your ears," (Ps. lviii. 4, 5.)*

With respect to Paul, it may be asked, Did he act contrary to his inclination or his judgment? Not the former, but the latter. His judgment approved of that which he sometimes neglected, and condemned that which he too often practised. On this ground only he criminates himself, confessing that his heart was not so perfectly devoted to God, as uniformly at all times to overcome the law in his members, and to perform his duty without opposition, from the principle of sin still within him. He speaks of himself as influenced by two opposite principles — namely, the flesh and the spirit, or the law of sin and the law of the spirit of life, and as being sometimes partially under the power of innate depravity, prompting him to thoughts, words, and actions, which afterwards gave him considerable pain and grief, making him cry out— "O wretched man that I am," &c. Yet upon the whole, his judgment never consented to sin. He delighted in the law of God after the inner man, and with his mind served it; so that it was not he who did the evil, but sin that dwelt in him, and opposed him in the discharge of his duty.

"I think we ought to distinguish between a willing-

* Matthew Henry, on John viii. 43.

ness that is habitual and general, and one that is universal and entire. Paul, and every real Christian, generally and habitually wills to be holy as God is holy; but this volition is not universal and entire. It is not so perfect nor intense as that there is no remainder of indolence or carnality. Perfection is the object approved or desired, but that approbation or desire is not perfect in degree. A perfect degree of willingness would be perfect holiness. I do not suppose the apostle to mean that sin operated absolutely, and in every sense, against his will. It was certainly against the ruling principle of his soul; but to suppose that any sin can be strictly and absolutely involuntary in its operations, is contrary to every dictate of common sense."*.

I remain, &c.

LETTER THE SEVENTH.

Other Objections replied to.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

OBJECTION 4. If it be the duty of men to believe, and admitting that they can believe if they will, and, moreover, if upon believing they will be saved, then men may be saved without divine grace; and upon this principle the necessity of divine influence is superseded, and the honours of sovereign grace are laid in the dust. It follows, therefore, that the apostle must be mistaken, and that, after all, "it is of him that willeth and runneth," and man is ultimately his own Saviour.

That it is the duty of sinners to believe has been

* Fuller's Dialogues—Dialogue v.

proved; and that all who believe will be saved, is taken for granted; Mark xvi. 16. The only point then in this objection is, how man's ability to perform his duty can be consistent with salvation by grace.

It appears to me, that the justice of God in the eternal punishment of sinners cannot be vindicated upon any other system, and we are not at liberty to impeach his unsullied rectitude under a pretended jealousy for the honours of sovereign grace. But, perhaps upon an impartial examination of this subject, it will appear to the reader that this is the only plan that tends directly to exalt our ideas of the free, rich, sovereign, and discriminating grace of God. Grace appears exceeding and abundant, shining with peculiar splendour and glory, in the salvation of those who, through the pride of their countenance, would not seek after God, nor have Jesus to reign over them. It would be a small thing to save such as are merely helpless and impotent, who, as many say, are as destitute of power as of will, in comparison of the salvation of those whose ability is equal to their obligations, but who employ all their energies in direct opposition to God and his gracious designs, and set all heaven at defiance. In the subjection of such determined enemies, divine grace reigns triumphantly, not over the weak, but over the strong, whose hearts were fully set in them to do evil. The Lord is found of them that sought him not; and the language of Paul is verified—"It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God who sheweth mercy." There was no previous goodness or disposition of heart inclining the sinner to seek after God. He was like Saul of Tarsus, willingly employed in the service of the enemy.

On the other system, the sinner finds an excuse for his late repentance in his supposed impotence, which detracts greatly from the honours of divine grace in his conversion. Jehovah may have the praise of making him able to do his duty, but room is left for the sinner to boast of his previous willingness, and that he always possessed a good heart, and would have turned to God sooner, if he had not been destitute of power.

Let me suppose a case.—A gentleman has two servants whose strength and duties are the same. They are ordered to be at their employment every morning at eight o'clock. On a certain occasion they neglect to rise in the morning. The master inquires the *cause*. John stretches himself upon his bed, and endeavours to form some excuses, but the sum of them is, that he is not inclined to rise. He has no heart to work; he does not like it, nor that his master should rule over him. He is able enough to work, but he is idle and unwilling. Thomas being interrogated, replies, that one of his legs is broken, (no matter by what means it was done,) and that he is no more able to leave his bed than to fly to the clouds, or to speak without a tongue. "I assure you, master," says he, "I am very sorry that I cannot attend to my duty. I would do anything in my power to serve you, but I cannot perform impossibilities. Believe me, I will work as soon as I am able." Neither of these servants performs the work assigned. One *will not* though he could, the other *cannot* though he would. Whether of them is most blameable, he that *will not*, or he that *cannot* work? Let them be brought into a court of justice to answer for neglecting their master's business, and what will be the verdict of an honest jury? The judge

would not pronounce a sentence of equal punishment on both. The lazy would be considered more criminal than the lame. The legitimate inference, so far as the case bears upon the subject, is, that he whose neglect of duty springs from the wickedness of his heart, is a greater sinner than he who neglects his duty on account only of his weakness. One chooses to be a rebel, the other cannot possibly obey. If then the former be more guilty, there is more grace displayed in his salvation, and therefore the objection falls to the ground. Nay, the objection remains in full force against the other side. Attributing man's unbelief to his weakness or want of power to believe is derogatory to the glory of sovereign grace, and prevents the exercise of sincere repentance, by furnishing the sinner with a plea and an excuse for his protracted impenitence and unbelief: "I could not help it." Nay, further, it leads the sinner indirectly to charge his sin and unbelief upon God. Men generally entertain a good opinion of their own disposition to do well, if they were placed in favourable circumstances; and hence their deficiencies and iniquities in conduct are attributed to the want of power or opportunity, and not to the want of inclination, which ultimately throws the blame upon God, and makes him the author of their sin. On this ground the sinner finds room for boasting that he always possessed a good heart and a willing mind to turn to God, but he was destitute of power. Is this really the case? or is not the reverse of it true? Man has ability, but no inclination, even while he supposes himself possessed of the latter, but not the former. Hence the necessity of divine influence, and that in an eminent degree.

It requires more grace to give a new heart than a new hand; to make a man willing, than merely to make him able. Let us view the opinions in their experimental and practical effects. If I could suppose the sentiment for which I contend did not perfectly harmonize with salvation by free grace, I would abandon it for ever. However different may be the views of some good men upon this subject, I will make my appeal to their own experience in behalf of my opinion.

What were your feelings and sentiments when converted to God? You were filled with shame, and humbled to the dust on account of your protracted rebellion against him. You found no excuse in your former want of ability to serve him; but, on the contrary, were ready to loathe and abhor yourself, because you did not begin to seek him at an earlier period of life. You were amazed at the goodness, the long-suffering, and forbearance of God towards you, and ready to acknowledge that the cause of your long-continued impenitence was exclusively in yourself, and that your time and strength had been spent in voluntary rebellion against Him who daily loaded you with mercies, and held your soul in life. Sin now appears hateful to you, and the grace by which you are saved great, free, rich, and glorious. You sink in humility, overflow with gratitude, and exult with joy. You give utterance to your feelings, and exclaim—"Bless the Lord, O my soul! What shall I render to the Lord? By the grace of God I am what I am! Had not that grace been rich, preventing, and sovereignly free, I had been still an enemy to God, for I had determined that he should not reign over me. But he made me *willing* in the

day of his power. Not unto me, Lord, not unto me, but to thy name be the glory, for thy mercy and thy truth's sake. My unbelief sprang not from a mere weakness, but from a wickedness of heart which nothing but omnipotent grace could overcome. The exceeding greatness of God's mighty power has been exerted in changing my heart, and giving me a disposition to believe the divine testimony, and to love the Saviour. I have not a syllable to utter on my own behalf. My plea is guilty, guilty. I have nothing to offer in arrest of judgment. I loved sin, and hated God; but grace has triumphed gloriously over my guilt, and over my heart. O Lord, I will praise thee!" This is the genuine language of true religion; but it can only be reconciled with the principle for which I contend. On any other plan a different language might be employed. Let the convert strongly believe that he could not have turned to God an hour sooner than he did, and he may reasonably say, "O Lord, I have been a great sinner, I confess, and I continued a long time an enemy to thee, and to thy truth. I ought to have served thee sooner, but the fact is, I could not. I had no strength or power to perform my duty. I would have served thee, but I found I could no more do so than raise the dead or create a world. I began to seek thy face as soon as ever strength was imparted, and that I sought thee no sooner is not my fault, because I had no control over that grace by which I am changed."

Does language like this tend to exalt our ideas of divine grace, or to make sin appear exceeding sinful? Little grace serves for the salvation of those who are only helpless; but great grace shines in the salvation of those who had power, but

employed it against God. In one we see the conquest of an infant; in the other, that of a mighty giant. I contend, therefore, that the sentiment maintained in these Letters is the only one that lays the sinner in the dust, and ascribes salvation wholly and exclusively to the sovereign grace of God.

Objection 5. Man is born unholy. The law of God, which is the rule of his duty, requires perfection. Will it be said, then, that it is the *present duty* of a sinner to be perfect, and that he possesses power equal to that duty, and that he therefore can be perfect if he will?

The strength of this objection lies equally against every system of religion which embraces the doctrine of original sin, the perfection and perpetuity of the divine law, and the general call of the gospel; and, therefore, others are as much under obligation to meet it as I am. But as it is supposed to militate particularly against the sentiment defended in these Letters, I will endeavour to remove it.

It is admitted that man is born unholy—that the law of God is holy, and requires truth in the inward parts, or, in other words, perfection. The question then which remains is,—Whether God, under the gospel, requires sinners to seek perfection by their own obedience to the law, or by faith in Christ? The divine law has been obeyed, and its penalty has been endured, by the Son of God, in our nature. The Lawgiver has been pleased to accept this righteousness, or fulfilment of the law by our Surety, and to place it to the account of every one that believes in Jesus, as if it had been performed by himself. The declaration of this is the sum of the gospel. The language of the Bible to a sinner in-

quiring the way to heaven is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." Wherefore, then, serveth the law? It was added because of transgression, and revealed that the offence might abound; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. It was not revealed that we might seek heaven by our obedience to it, for by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God. If there had been a law which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law; but if righteousness had come by the law, then Christ had died in vain. Sinners, therefore, are not required to seek perfection by personal obedience to the law, but by faith in Christ, for the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did, by the which we draw nigh to God.

It is only by faith in Jesus that the authority and requirements of the law can be perfectly established. In embracing Christ, the sinner honours the divine law. He practically declares himself destitute of a righteousness, and unable to obtain one by his own obedience. He confesses himself to be justly condemned by the law; but seeing the precept honoured by the perfect obedience of Jesus, and its tremendous curse removed by his death, he flees to him as the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. Thus the believer gives the law, in the person of his Surety, all it demands, namely, a perfect righteousness and a perfect sacrifice, and at the same time gives glory to God by giving credit to his testimony, and cheerfully surrendering his heart to the control of his authority. This is the perfection we are called to pursue, to seek accept-

ance in the Beloved, and to be made the righteousness of God in him,—to be complete in Jesus, who is the head of all principality and power. He that seeks to be perfect in any other way, opposes the Bible and its Author, and rejects the only remedy for guilty men. If, however, the sinner will cleave to the law, and attempt to establish his own righteousness, rather than submit to the righteousness of Christ, let him hear what the law saith, and prepare (if he knows how) to meet the consequences: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," (Gal. iii. 10.) "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin," (Rom. iii. 19, 20.) Sinners will find, to their cost, that not being perfect according to the standard and requirements of the law, and having rejected Him by whom alone the law has been magnified and made honourable, they must bear its heaviest curses through an endless eternity. The law itself requires us to believe whatever God reveals; and hence, he that believeth not is condemned already, and remains under the authority and curse of the law, and must take his trial accordingly; and the sentence of the Judge will proceed, not only upon his disobedience of the law, but especially upon his contempt of the Saviour, provided and revealed by infinite, eternal, and unbounded love.

It will still be urged that *man is born unholy*, and

is, therefore, necessarily corrupt and sold under sin. But it may be replied, that this necessary bondage to sin is voluntary, and that we are so far from checking or opposing sin, that we nourish and strengthen it both in the habit and the exercise. And, as an old divine says, "This corruption of our nature, though it be *necessary* to us, yet it is no violent necessity from an outward cause, but a necessity that we willingly pull upon ourselves, and therefore ought the more to humble us; for the more necessarily we sin, the more voluntarily—and the more *voluntarily*, the more necessarily, the will putting itself *voluntarily* into these fetters of sin. *Necessity* is no plea when the *will* is the immediate cause of any action. Men's hearts tell them they might rule their *desires* if they would. For, tell a man of any *dish* which he liketh, that there is poison in it, and he will not meddle with it. So tell him that death is in that sin which he is about to commit, and he will abstain if he believe it to be so; if he believe it not, it is his voluntary unbelief and atheism.

"If the will would use that sovereignty it should and could at the first, we should be altogether freed from this necessity. Men are not damned because they *cannot* do better, but because they *will* do no better. If there were no *will* there would be no hell. For men *willingly* submit to the rule and law of sin; they plead for it, and like it so well, as they hate nothing so much as that which any way withstandeth those lawless laws."*

If the unholiness of our nature were our grief, it

* The Soul's Conflict and Victory, by R. Sibbs, D.D., 1635, pp. 208, 211.

would not be our master; but, being our delight, we are enslaved by it now, and ruined by it eternally. No plea can be derived from our voluntary sin to excuse our conduct, lessen our guilt, justify our unbelief, or mitigate our punishment in a future world. The objector asks, *Is it the present duty of a sinner to be perfect? and can he be perfect if he will?* Perfection of nature is not to be sought but through Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness. The objection, therefore, resolves itself simply into this— "*Ought a sinner to believe in Christ? and could he believe if he were inclined? and must he perish everlastingly if he die an unbeliever?*" The whole of this has been answered again and again in the preceding pages.

OBJECTION 6. Provided that man, strictly speaking, has power or strength to believe, yet as he has no will or inclination to exercise that power, and actually to believe, it all amounts to the same thing. He cannot believe without a will to believe, and he cannot give himself that will; so that, after all, he is shut up in unbelief, without a possibility of escape, nor can he help going on in his trespasses, unless God change his heart.

In reply to this objection, it is granted that no sinner will believe till his heart is changed, and he is made willing, for

> "None but a power divinely strong
> Can turn the current of the soul."

But this does not at all affect the question, which is, not whether man *will* turn, but whether he *could* if he was inclined, and whether his unbelief is voluntary and criminal, or physical and blameless? To say man has no will, and that he cannot give

himself a will, is to say nothing to the purpose, unless it be meant that he wishes to have a will, but cannot. To suppose a man who is unwilling to come to Christ, to be at the same time willing to have a will to come, and sorry that he is destitute of such a will, is to suppose a gross absurdity and contradiction. Can a person have two prevailing opposite wills at the same time? Can he choose what he dislikes, and love what he hates? If the sinner asks, "How must I get a will?" I reply, he does not want one. If that is not satisfactory, let him ask the man who once was a drunkard, how he obtained a will to refrain his cups; the prodigal, how he came to be frugal; the miser, how he became liberal; or, the saint, how he came by a will to leave his sins. To say, that because man is unwilling to believe, therefore he could not believe if he were willing, is false reasoning and unsound divinity. Besides, to represent man as under an inevitable necessity of continuing in unbelief and sin, unless God pleases to change his heart, is indirectly to charge the ground of his unbelief and sin upon the Almighty, and thus render the sinner excusable, if God do not give him that measure of grace which will effectually change his heart. "Natural power is power properly so called, and is, to all intents and purposes, sufficient to render men accountable beings; the want of inclination in a sinner is of no account with the Governor of the world; he proceeds in his requirements, and it is right that he should proceed in the same way as if no such disinclination existed."* This principle leads, as might be clearly evinced, either to the heights of Antinomianism, by denying

* Fuller's Memoirs, by Morris.

an obligation to believe where there is no will, or to the depths of Arminianism, by supposing divine influence upon the sinner to be necessary to render him accountable for his unbelief. Nor can these extremes be avoided, but on the principles for which I contend.

Shall we say, that he who needs divine influence to change his heart, is guiltless in his opposition to God? that his love of sin is not criminal, because it is too strong to be subdued by moral means? and that the felon who is regarded as incorrigible is less guilty, on that very account, than he who may be reclaimed by persuasion and discipline? To suppose that a depraved, wicked heart, renders men excusable, is to outrage reason and common sense; for then, the more unwilling a person is to act right, the less he is to blame; and thus his very wickedness becomes the ground of his justification. On this principle, a sinner, by hardening himself in transgression, might weaken his obligations to God, till he had rendered himself morally unaccountable for his conduct. Thus, the very devils, who have no will to love God, and who are so obstinate and incorrigible in their enmity to him that they can never be reconciled, are the most innocent of any of his creatures. In every other case, the want of will to act right does not extenuate, but aggravate, a man's guilt, and why not in the concerns of religion? Suppose a murderer, when convicted of his crime, to admit the fact, and in his defence plead, that he committed it from inclination, and that he had no will to act otherwise than he did, and that he could not give himself a will, so that he had no power or possibility of acting differently,—what impression, I ask, would be made upon the court by his defence?

Would they admit his want of will as a sufficient excuse? or, could they hear such a plea with patience?

The objection says, that as the sinner has no will to exercise his power and actually to believe in Christ, it amounts to the *same thing* as if he had no power. It is said, if he cannot, he cannot, whatever be the cause. It may be added, that man was born with this disposition of heart, and that he could no more prevent his being born impure, than he could fix the time or place of his birth, or prevent his being born blind, or dumb, or lame.

Here I would notice, in the first place, the assertion, that man's having no will to love God, or believe in Christ, *amounts* to the *same thing* as if he had *no power*. This reasoning is not correct. The servant that would obey if he could, cannot be equally criminal with him that could obey if he would. Is man required either to perform impossibilities on pain of condemnation, or else only to perform just so much as he is willing to perform? Is there no difference of meaning between the reply, "I cannot," and "I will not"? Do a master and a mistress put the same construction on both when given in answer to their commands? Should this be admitted, it would furnish men, when charged with crime, with a new species of argument in support of their conduct, of which take the following specimen :—

"A want of power or a want of will to work," says the slothful person, "amounts all to the *same thing*. Whatever power I may have to obey, I can say with truth, and bring good evidence of it if necessary, that I have no will, and that I never loved work in my life. I had always an aversion to labour, and, it being so contrary to my inclination,

I could never be reconciled to it. I can take pleasure in looking on while others are employed, but I have no will to labour myself, and from my childhood I have ever felt a fixed reluctance to work. I believe that I brought this disposition into the world with me, and, therefore, am no more to blame on this ground, than if I had been born without hands, or a cripple, or had been confined to my bed by sickness all the days of my life. And it all amounts to the *same*, whether I refrain working from want of will, or want of power; I *will not* and I *cannot* mean the *selfsame thing*." The haughty servant might say to his master, "Sir, I am unwilling to be under authority and control. I never did like it. From my cradle I have ever been under the influence of an ambitious mind, and could never bear the idea of being under the direction and command of another, or of acknowledging any one as my superior." The thief might plead that he never possessed a will to be honest, but always felt an inclination to steal, and to injure his neighbour. The murderer might say that his disposition was always cruel, even from a child; and as to the particular fact charged upon him, he could assure all concerned, that he committed it with the full bent of his inclination, that he was very hearty in it, and that he had not the least degree of will to act otherwise than he did. He could assure them that he had no will to the contrary, and he could not give himself a will; and, therefore, whatever power he had to have acted differently, seeing he had no will, and could not give himself a will, it all amounted to the *same thing*.

I freely grant that man is born with this evil propensity, this want of will; but what will this avail

the objector? Our question respects not original sin, but man's personal conduct, in the circumstances in which he is placed by his Creator, and by the fall of Adam. Is he, or is he not, found aiding and abetting the enemies of God? Suppose the sinner indicted for high treason against God, what a defence, on the principle of the objection, might he offer?

"I am," says he, "deemed a traitor, but it should be remembered that I was born one, and that I have been one therefore from my birth. My parents were traitors, and have communicated the principle to all their children. It is completely a family complaint. I inherit the principle from my forefathers, who have all of them been traitors, in their several generations. Besides, I have done nothing but what I was strongly inclined to do. I always felt a rooted enmity of heart to God, and a desire to overthrow his government; and I never experienced the least wish to be under his authority, or to seek his favour. My aversion of heart to what he *is*, and *does*, and *says*, has been strong, uniform, and constant from my youth. As I brought this disposition into the world with me, and so never had a will to believe in Jesus or act otherwise than a traitor, and as I could not give myself a will, it amounts to the *same* thing as if I had no power at all to do the will of God. For what is the use of strength where there is no will to employ it?" Surely that man must be very dull who cannot discern the propriety of distinguishing between *power* and *will*, between *strength* of hand, and *disposition* of heart.

I might undertake to prove that neither the doctrine of special election, particular redemption, or the restriction of divine influence to the elect, any

more than the sinner's natural weakness, prevents any one from doing his duty to God. The sole reason of his unbelief rests with himself, as will be made to appear before an assembled world of angels, men, and devils, at the last day.

> "Then God shall make his justice known,
> And the whole world, before his throne,
> With joy or terror shall confess
> The glory of his righteousness."

Suffer me, my dear Friend, in concluding my remarks on this subject, to introduce a quotation from the late Rev. Robert Hall, sen., and another from the late Andrew Fuller, which will prove, at least, that if I err upon this point I stand not alone.

"One question I forgot to attend to, viz., If a man cannot while carnal, or till he be renewed by grace, chuse spiritual things, how is he the subject of blame, seeing he cannot do otherwise (being the subject of a carnal mind) than oppose the gospel? Answer—A man is not blameable for the non-performance of what is superior to his *natural* power or ability. God does not require any thing of his creatures which they, though ever so willing, are unable to perform. A debility in mental or bodily powers certainly acquits every man of guilt arising from the non-performance of what he really wills to do, but, through natural weakness, cannot possibly accomplish. In this sense, it would not be just to require of man more than he can possibly perform. But moral debility, or an aversion to what is good, cannot be considered as an excuse or extenuation of guilt. For instance, if a man be accused by his master of idleness, would it be enough for him to say and prove that he never loved work in his life? If a person be tried for the crime of

murder, would his saying, 'I always hated the man I killed,' prove him innocent? The question is, whether the aversion of a natural man to *spiritual* things is not so great, as that nothing short of Almighty power can produce such a change in his heart as is necessary to his chusing them or delighting in them; and not whether he could not if he would? Therefore, the author referred to quite misseth the mark when he compares the Calvinist's view of the future judgment to a resurrection of the various tribes of animals in order to punish those who did not run as fast as the race horse. To make his simile suit, he should first prove that a cow *could* run as fast as the greyhound or the race horse if she *would*. *Natural* and *moral* ability are so different that to suppose God to require more of his creatures than they have ability for, in the first sense (viz., natural), is to exclude the idea of justice; and, in the second sense, to suppose he requires no more than they are able to perform, we lose the idea of the exercise of mercy. 'This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.'"*

I add now the testimony of Andrew Fuller:—

"God actually treats the want of disposition, not as an excuse, but as a sin; and we take it for granted that *what God does is right*, whether we can comprehend it or not. Howbeit, in this case it happens, that with the testimonies of God accord those of conscience and common sense. Every man's conscience 'finds fault' with him for the evils which he commits willingly or of choice; and instead of

* Hall on the Causes of Salvation and Damnation.

making any allowance for previous aversion, nothing more is necessary to rivet the charge. And, with respect to the common sense of mankind in their treatment one of another, what judge or what jury ever took into consideration the previous aversion of a traitor or a murderer, with a view to the diminishing of his guilt? On the contrary, the tracing of any thing to that origin, rivets the charge, and terminates the inquiry. With the united testimony therefore of God, conscience, and common sense on our side, we make light of objections, which, as to their principle, were repelled by an apostle, and which are retained only in the school of metaphysical infidelity."*

I remain, &c.

LETTER THE EIGHTH.

Remarks of a Correspondent on the nature of Man's Inability, and Reply.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

It may not be improper, before I close this correspondence, to inform you that a considerable portion of the remarks contained in the preceding Letters, was published in the *New Evangelical Magazine*, in 1822. A gentleman furnished a paper to the same periodical, animadverting, though very temperately, upon some of my positions, and requesting further explanation. To this paper I thought it desirable to reply. It is but proper to put these documents into your possession.

* Fuller's Dialogues, &c.: Answer to Queries.

Mr. Editor,

I have observed in your numbers for November and December last, a long treatise "On the extent of man's ability to do the will of God;" and, although I agree with your correspondent on the general import of his arguments, yet I could heartily wish he had been a little more explicit in his distinction between *man's power* and *his inclination*.

There appears some incoherence in applying the circumstance of a "drunkard's refraining from his cups—the prodigal becoming frugal," &c., to the ability of man to do the will of God. The proceedings of the former, in respect to their reformation, may spring from causes entirely inapplicable to the latter. Absolute necessity frequently effects, in these cases, what other means would be incapable to perform; the drunkard might cease to drink, and the prodigal to be extravagant; yet, their *wills* may still remain unchanged, and their dispositions as truly wedded to former practices as ever.

J. H. intimates, that God's justice in the punishment of sinners cannot be justified on any other ground, "than man's possessing ability to do the will of God." Does not this reflect on the divine goodness, in permitting sin to enter the world, and depreciate the sovereign authority Jehovah has over his creatures? I should think that our Maker's absolute right, and man's obligation to him, as his Creator, Lawgiver, and Benefactor, in connexion with the perfection of excellencies he possessed when first coming from his Maker's hands, would justify the "Judge of all the earth" in punishing his rebellious subjects for the violation of those precepts they are obliged to obey.

I should be obliged if J. H. would, in some future

number of your miscellany, give us his thoughts on the following portions of scripture, as they seem to describe *man's* want of ability, as well as *will*, to obey the commands of God:—Eph. ii. 1—5 ; 2 Tim. ii. 26 ; 1. Pet. ii. 19. This inability appears to me to be their sin, when viewed as the result of that bondage they experience, by yielding themselves servants to obey the deceitfulness of sin, and false suggestions of the prince of darkness.

By inserting these thoughts in your Magazine, as soon as convenient, you will much oblige,

Yours very respectfully,

C. R.

REPLY.

Mr. Editor,

Your correspondent, C. R., agrees with the general import of the arguments I have advanced respecting "man's ability to do the will of God," but wishes for a more explicit distinction between *man's power* and *his inclination.*

I would recommend to C. R. to look again at the place he refers to, respecting the "drunkard refraining from his cups, &c.," and he will see that his exception is utterly unfounded, inasmuch as the change of conduct in the drunkard, the prodigal, the miser, &c., is represented solely to be the result of a change of will ; and I wonder how he could overlook this point, and say "their wills may still remain unchanged, and their dispositions as truly wedded to former practices as ever." The very words are, "Ask the man who once was a drunkard, how he *obtained a will* to refrain his cups."

There does not then appear any incoherence in applying the circumstance to the case I had in hand.

C. R. suggests that the sentiment I have contended for would "reflect on the divine goodness in permitting sin to enter the world." This conclusion I cannot by any means admit, unless it first be proved that man had no ability to stand. The argument points directly the other way, and the *goodness* and the *justice* of the SUPREME BEING are reflected upon in exact proportion as he is represented requiring from either Adam or any of his posterity something beyond their ability to perform, and then casting them into endless misery for the non-performance of it.

When C. R. adverts to "God's absolute right, and to man's perfection as he came from his Maker's hands, to justify the 'Judge of all the earth' in punishing his rebellious subjects for the violation of those precepts which they are obliged to obey," does he mean to say that men are obliged to obey precepts which it is really and actually impossible for them to obey, and that God's absolute right and sovereign authority will vindicate the righteousness of his proceedings, in dooming his creatures to eternal misery for invincible disobedience or absolute impossibilities? Unless he avow this, my argument remains untouched, and consequently unimpaired and unanswered. The Judge of all the earth will do right, nor will he condemn and punish any of his creatures by mere prerogative.

The third thing that C. R. wishes is to have my "thoughts on the following portions of scripture, as they seem," he says, "to describe *man's* want of

ability, as well as *will*, to obey the commands of God:—Eph. ii. 1—5; 2 Tim. ii. 26; 2 Peter ii. 19." Now, supposing that these texts did express man's want of power or ability, yet C. R. himself declares this very inability to be man's sin. And if I understand him, he allows that man is the *voluntary slave* of sin; that he yields to it; and that on this ground he is criminal, and justly condemned by his Maker and his Judge, which is, in short, the whole contended for by J. H. Indeed, not to allow this, he must resolve the sinner's condemnation into Divine Sovereignty, and maintain that sinners could never possibly avoid that sin for which they suffer the damnation of hell. This (which is the only alternative) would be awful beyond description! Is it not inconsistent with all the ideas we have formed of the perfections of Jehovah, to suppose that he will consign any of his creatures to eternal punishment for not complying with those duties which they never had the power of performing? If, then, such a procedure be contrary to all our ideas of perfect equity and eternal justice—contrary to all our notions of right and wrong among men—if it be a proceeding that would expose an earthly judge to universal and lasting reproach and infamy—if it be contrary to the real, genuine experience of a Christian, in his sorrow and repentance for his wilful disobedience to God—and if, moreover, it is found to be contrary to the general tenor of the Scriptures, it must be denied and directly opposed, though a few figurative texts should *seem* to give it countenance. I say this, without admitting that any text of scripture does, directly or indirectly, support that idea. The Scriptures are throughout consistent with themselves, whether the fact appear

so to us or not; and, therefore, if the general tenor of the Bible support any one doctrine or sentiment, individual texts must not be so explained as to oppose that doctrine. It is a bad rule of interpretation to sacrifice the whole body of the Bible for the sake of supporting a darling hypothesis by a few select passages torn from their connexion, and then made to prove what the Holy Spirit never intended. This appears to me a sufficient reply respecting the texts referred to. But that it may not even seem that they contain anything opposed to the sentiment advanced, I will just glance at them.

The texts referred to certainly represent man as *dead* in trespasses and sins—as walking according to the course of this world—and under the influence of Satan, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind—as being in the snare of the devil, and taken captive by him at his will—yea, as being the servant of corruption, by which they are overcome and brought into bondage. This is the sum of them. Now, Mr. Editor, is there anything here to prove that man is not the *willing* slave of sin? or that he could not act otherwise than he does, *provided he were inclined to do so?* The dominion that sin and Satan has over sinners appears, from the very texts, to be exercised by their own consent. They yield themselves to their government: "His servants ye are to whom ye obey." If there be anything here that can be considered as opposed to the sentiment under consideration, it must be found in the words that men are "dead in trespasses and in sins." But as men are not *literally* dead, the language must be *figurative*, and the figure must be founded upon some analogy that exists between the state of the dead literally, and that of the unre-

newed sinner. The Scriptures often speak of sinners as dead in a legal sense—dead in point of law; because they are under its curse, (Gal. iii. 10,) as guilty before God, (Rom. iii. 19, 20,) and condemned already, (John iii. 18—36.) This kind of death, which is generally intended in the divine word, (2 Cor. v. 14, 15,) does not, it will be granted, affect the present argument, inasmuch as it does not relate either to man's power or inclination, but to his state in the eye of the divine law.

There is also a moral, or, as most persons call it, a spiritual death, which consists in the enmity of the heart to God: "To be carnally minded is death," (Rom. viii. 6, 7.) The figure, we admit, is very strong; but does the dead sinner, in every sense, bear a resemblance to a dead body in the grave? To this inquiry I should be inclined to reply in the negative. To be *dead in* sin, is the same in meaning as to be *alive to* sin. To be dead *in sin*, is to be *sinfully* dead. To be so attached and so wedded to the pleasures of sin, as to have no room in the heart for the Saviour, or any attachment to him, is the same thing as to be alienated from the life of God, or, in other words, to be dead in sin. Sinners are not naturally alive to God; they have no relish, no gust or appetite for divine and spiritual things. They are dead to everything holy and heavenly: "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." Hence sinners, dead in sin, are represented as blind and deaf, as dumb and lame. But this death in sin, and this impotence, are of a moral nature; and we should be careful that we do not stretch the figure beyond due bounds, lest we at once outrage both revelation and common sense. We must bear in mind that the sinner's death in sin,

and his blindness, deafness, &c., are represented in the Scriptures as voluntary and criminal. We do not speak of the dead in their graves as being *now* dumb or lame. They might have been so when living, but such terms do not properly apply to the dead. Nor can we, consistent with common sense, say of them, "Their heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, &c., (Acts xxviii. 27.) This language is altogether inapplicable to the dead in their graves. They have no choice, no will, no act in the business; they do not love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil; nor are they afraid of coming to the light lest their deeds should be reproved, (John iii. 19, 20.) It is not said of them, as of sinful men, that they "will not hearken to the voice of the charmers, charming ever so wisely," (Ps. lviii. 5,) nor are they called upon to look unto the Saviour and be saved, (Isa. xlv. 22,) to come to him for rest, and to hearken to him and live, (Isa. lv. 2, 3.) We never think of charging the dead in their graves with criminality, for lying there so long; nor blame them for not seeing or hearing, or for not listening when we call upon them. It is not said to them, "I called, and ye refused; therefore, I will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh," (Prov. i. 24—26.) It is clear, then, that the parallel was never designed, by the Spirit of God, to hold good throughout, or to take away the choice of action, and the consequent responsibility, from the sinner, as from the body of a dead man. This would annihilate all criminality, for the dead in their graves do not sin. They are completely passive,

and are moved or are at rest at the will, or by the agency, of others. But the sinner dead in sin is active; he is a voluntary agent in the commission of those sins which evince to a demonstration, that he is dead in trespasses and in sins. His death, therefore, must be understood consistently with his accountability to God as a moral agent, and a subject of his moral government. This death consists, I presume, in that alienation of heart from the life of God, whereby the sinner is completely destitute of any, even the least, desire after God or holiness. He desires not the knowledge of God, or of his ways. "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts," viz., as a desirable Being, (Job xxi. 14, 15; Ps. x. 4.) Nay, the sinner is not only destitute of everything truly good, having no vital principle of holiness in him; but he is positively filled with evil, even with enmity to God, so that he is not subject to his law, nor indeed can be, (Rom. viii. 6—8.) This moral death has spread its clay-cold hand over the whole soul, and, by its dominion and influence, it produces total darkness in the understanding, (1 Cor. ii. 14; Eph. v. 8; Isa. xxvii. 11, lx. 2,)—enmity of heart to God, and to his law, (Rom. viii. 7,) and contrariety and insubordination of will to the will of Jehovah, (John v. 40; Luke xix. 14, 27; Ps. cx. 3,) or rather, I should have said, that these things constitute the moral or spiritual death of the sinner.

The other texts (2 Tim. ii. 26; 2 Pet. ii. 19) to which C. R. refers, only represent men as the willing slaves of Satan, and voluntary servants of corruption. If what I have now said, and also in the piece animadverted upon, be considered as con-

clusive, nothing more need be added; and if not, I could have little hope that any further remarks of mine would give satisfaction. I shall, therefore, conclude this paper by an extract from a writer of the present day.

"Men, before they know the truth, are said to be *dead* in trespasses and sins, (Eph. ii. 1—5.) The death here spoken of is evidently that which divines have termed *spiritual*, or which consists in the loss of the divine favour, (v. 2, 3.) Agreeably to this, their actions are termed dead works, (Heb. ix. 14,) that is, they are the works of those who are spiritually dead, having no vital principle of holiness in them—of men enslaved to sin and led captive by the devil at his will—and they have a tendency to eternal death, (Eph. ii. 5; Col. ii. 13.) But though this be the language of the inspired writers, and though it evidently implies some analogy between the human frame, in which the vital principle is wholly extinct, and that of a living person entirely enslaved to sin, yet there is a danger of running the parallel too close, which, indeed, is often done, and men are represented to be as destitute of any kind of strength or ability, as a dead body is of that which is physical. It ought to be remembered that even those who are "dead in trespasses and sins" are nevertheless possessed of reason, conscience, and judgment, which render them accountable beings, and the proper subjects of instruction, admonition, exhortation, and warning. They have natural powers and mental faculties, which capacitate them for hearing and giving attention to the word of truth; and there is no inability in them to receive it but what results from their disinclination towards it. They love the world and sin; and these engross all their regard.

Hence the complaint of the Saviour—'Ye will not come to me that ye might have life,' (John v. 40.) This should not be overlooked by the teachers of Christianity."—(See Jones's Biblical Cyclopædia, —Art. Death.)

I have now, my dear Friend, stated my sentiments upon this important, but disputed topic, with unreserved freedom. If I did not think sufficient had been advanced to produce and to strengthen conviction of the obligation and ability of sinners to believe the gospel, I might proceed to shew how the contrary opinion reflects upon the wisdom, veracity, and sincerity of Jehovah; but I deem it unnecessary. Whether you can or cannot assent to the doctrines I have advocated, let me assure you that I am your sincere friend in the affectionate bonds of the everlasting gospel,

JAMES HARGREAVES.

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